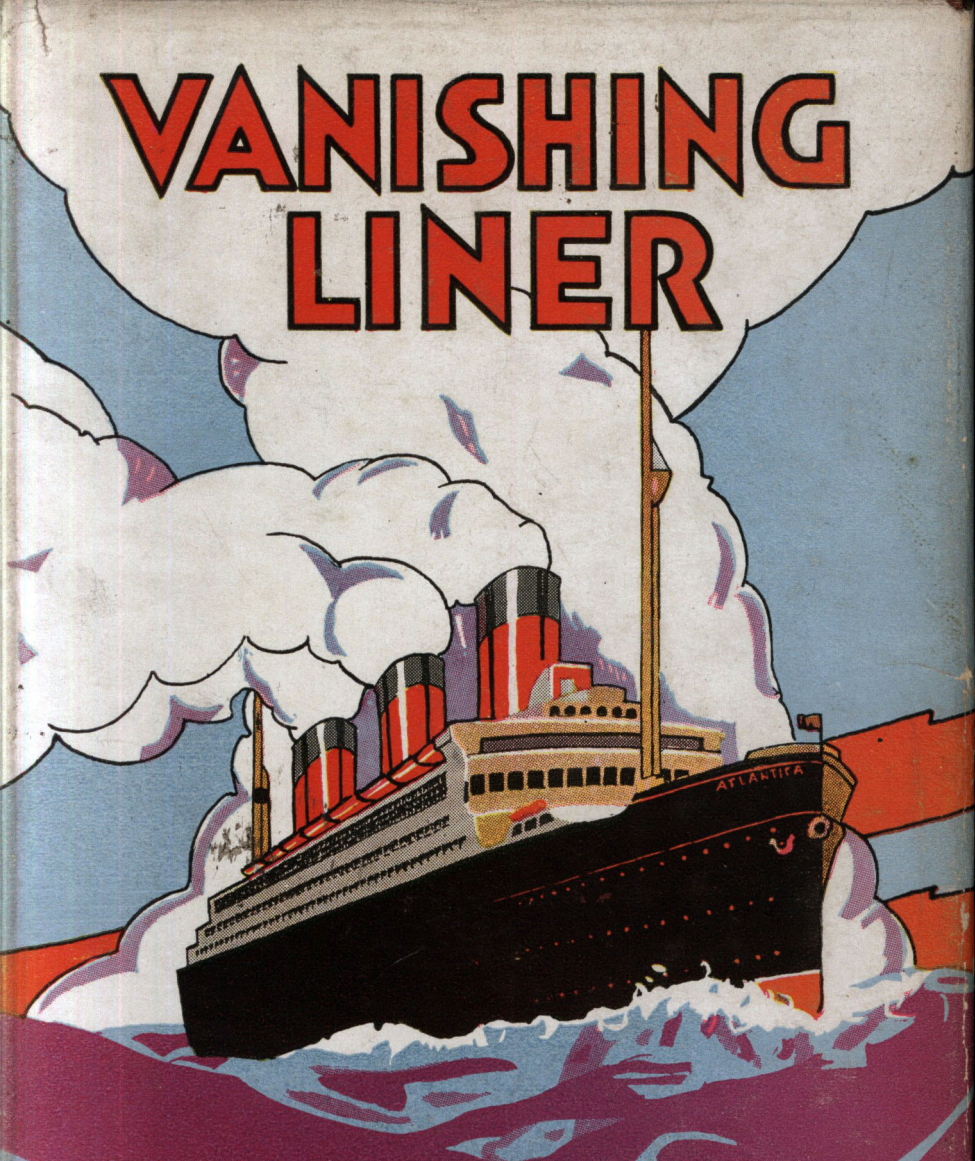
VANISHING LINER



GEORGE MORSE

VANISHING LINER

By George Morse

High Adventure on the North Atlantic . . . . . a mystery of ships that vanish in mid-ocean.

The world is alarmed by the disappearance of ships in the North Atlantic and the Great Northern Transportation Company, which has lost two vessels, is determined to solve the mystery. The Great Northern Company has plans to build the two fastest liners afloat and a rival company is suspected of the mysterious attacks.

In command of the expedition which sets out to solve the mystery is Prof. Randolph Pearson, eminent scientist. He sets up a complete laboratory aboard the ATLANTICA, crack liner of the Great Northern. With him are his assistants, Bob Ellis and Glenn Heath. Their task is to stay aboard the liner on its transoceanic dashes for they are confident that an attempt will be made on the ATLANTICA.

The Vanishing Liner moves rapidly, abounds in pulse-quickening action, weaves the threads of half a dozen adventures through the luxurious cabins of the ATLANTICA, and ends with a stirring climax of adventure on the high sea.

The Fun Loving Gang Series

By Harold M. Sherman

Have you ever heard a boy laugh while reading? I'm sure you haven't until you hear some youngster laughing at the harmless pranks he is going to read about in these books!

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Harold Sherman is particularly adapted to write this type of story, and when we gave him the assignment, he just cut loose and gave us his two best!

Always Up to Something
In Wrong Right

THE GOLDSMITH PUBLISHING CO.
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EVERY BOY'S MYSTERY SERIES

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This is a story of the world's greatest dirigible and of the dangers in the frozen wastes of the Arctic—a combination sure to provide thrills for every reader.

The *Goliath*, largest dirigible in the world, is to meet the submarine *Neptune* at the North pole. The *Neptune* encounters one mishap after another in the drifting ice of the Arctic and Harry Curtis, its radio operator, sends an S. O. S. to Andy High, assistant commander of the *Goliath*. The dirigible starts north. Captain Harkins, the commander, is stricken and Andy takes charge of the rescue attempt.

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By **EDWIN GREEN**

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By **GEORGE MORSE**

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VANISHING LINER

By **GEORGE MORSE**

The Vanishing Liner moves rapidly, abounds in pulse-quickening action, weaves the threads of half a dozen adventures through the luxurious cabins of the ATLANTICA, and ends with a stirring climax of adventure on the high sea.

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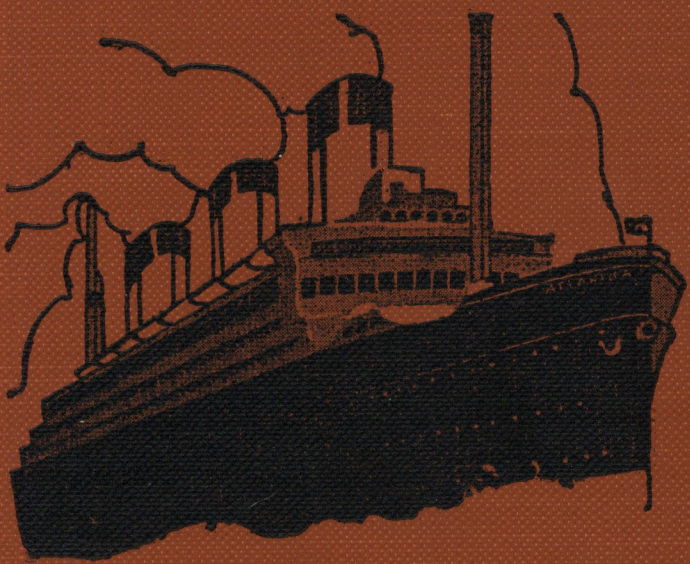

GEORGE MORSE

William Flanagan

VANISHING LINER

Vanishing Liner

By

GEORGE MORSE

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CHICAGO

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VANISHING LINER

Chapter I

In the Laboratory

The New York water front was shrouded in a fog that had crept in off Sandy Hook just after sunset. Street lights glowed dimly and the thick, grey stuff cast a mantle of mystery over the entire vicinity of West 14th Street.

At the Cunard pier the *Berengaria* was making ready for a midnight departure for Europe. Trucks rumbled out of the blackness and taxis, their horns screeching a warning at unwary pedestrians, scurried about. It was the only place of activity within blocks, piers of rival lines being deserted with the exception of watchmen who patrolled their lonely beats.

Back along Fourteenth Street and atop the Leitsweiler Building, bright lights in a penthouse tried to pierce the murk with only a little more success than the street lamps below. It was the laboratory of Professor Randolph Pearson, eminent scientist.

The bungalow laboratory consisted of three rooms. The entrance, which was by a private elevator direct from the street eleven floors below, opened into a small office and beyond this was the great, high-ceilinged room in which many a famous experiment had been carried to a successful completion. The third room was a small shower and dressing room.

Professor Pearson was in the office, studying a chart, while in the laboratory two of his young assistants were working on a special microphone they had been perfecting. The taller of the two straightened up to ease his aching back. He glanced at the clock over the door which led to the office.

"Nine o'clock," he murmured. "Say, Glenn, we'd better stop and go down the street to get something to eat. Do you realize we've been working on this 'mike' since eleven o'clock this morning without stopping?"

Glenn Heath tightened a tiny screw on the microphone case before answering.

"I'm hungry, Bob, but I want to make several more tests so we'll be sure we have this thing licked," he said.

"Our theories are right. The 'mike's' got to work. I tell you, I'm getting shaky. We can go out, get something to eat, and be back here in less than half an hour. That means we'll be through by midnight."

"Then I'm going to bed and sleep for 24 hours," grinned Glenn, as he laid down his screw driver.

Bob Ellis, the other assistant, walked toward the washroom with Glenn close behind him. Bob was tall, nearly six feet, with a fiery thatch of red hair and blue eyes that almost radiated sparks when he became angry.

Glenn, a year older than Bob, was somewhat shorter, but he made up in weight what he lacked in height. There was a quizzical expression about Glenn's face, as though he was always questioning the why of everything.

Both boys, honor students at Grant Technical high, had been taken into the laboratory by Professor Pearson, who was always on the lookout for promising youngsters with a yearning for scientific work. For more than a year they had been in the laboratory, most of the time doing routine work, but once in a while

participating in one of the mysteries the scientist had been called upon to solve.

Their latest project, the new microphone, was designed to be the most sensitive ever developed. From a practical standpoint it would be worth a good many thousands in patent rights, but all inventions perfected in the laboratory were the property of Professor Pearson. However, Bob and Glenn, who were receiving training that few young men could even dream of having, were satisfied. They received good salaries, had pleasant working conditions, and were gaining a reputation in the scientific field. Some day they would start out with a laboratory of their own.

They splashed water noisily as they bathed their faces and hands. Bob, through first, waited for his more deliberate companion.

They had been so intent upon their work that the fog had crept over the city unnoticed.

"It's a bad night; fog's as thick as soup. It's almost impossible to see the lights below."

"I'm glad we haven't far to go to the restaurant," said Glenn. "It's an easy thing to get lost in the fog."

"Don't I know it," chuckled Bob. "There was a fog about like this last spring and I went out into it thinking I could find my way all right. I was half the night getting home."

They walked across the laboratory and entered the office. Bob pushed the button which controlled the automatic elevator just as the telephone on Professor Pearson's desk rang. The professor, engrossed in the study of his chart, failed to hear the telephone, so deep was his concentration. Glenn picked up the instrument.

"Pearson laboratory," he said. Then he added quickly, "Yes, I'll call him."

Glenn put the phone back on the desk, reached over and shook the scientist.

Professor Pearson looked up, startled at the sudden interruption of his thoughts.

"Oh, good morning, Glenn," he said. Then, catching sight of Bob at the elevator shaft, he added, "You're early, boys."

"Not early," grinned Glenn, "just late. It's night. We've all been here all day."

"So we have," smiled the professor, "so we have. How is the microphone coming?"

"Splendidly," replied Glenn. "There's a gentleman calling on the telephone who insists that he must speak to you. He says he is Gifford Crain, vice president of the Great Northern Transportation Company."

"I'll talk with him," nodded Professor Pearson, reaching for the telephone. "You lads wait a minute."

"Hello Gifford," he said. "What's the matter now?"

Whatever it was took some time to relate and the scientist bent an attentive ear.

"Yes, of course, I'll see you. Come over to my laboratory at once. You'll have to phone up from below and I'll release the automatic elevator so you may come up. I'll expect you within the hour."

Professor Pearson handed the telephone to Glenn and leaned back in his chair.

"Going out for the night?" he asked.

"Not yet," replied Bob. "We've got the new 'mike' about done. As soon as we get something to eat we'll be back."

"Splendid. Mr. Crain of the Great Northern Company is coming over at once. Seems

there's trouble about some of their crack trans-Atlantic liners and he thinks we can help him."

"What do you mean by 'we'?" asked Glenn quickly.

The scientist ran his thin fingers through the sparse hair which clung to his head and chuckled.

"It may mean a trip to Europe," he said, "and I thought you boys might like to come along. You've been working pretty steadily in the laboratory. The change would do you good. You may be sure that if we go, it will be on the quest for something very much out of the ordinary. Gifford Crain is one of the shrewdest men I know and when he admits that he is afraid and needs help, there's a first class mystery around close."

Chapter II

A Close Call

When the private elevator reached the street level, the young scientists stepped out into the dense fog.

"Whew, but this is thick stuff," said Bob, straining his eyes in an attempt to see to the corner, only half a block away. "Which restaurant shall it be?"

"The one around the corner is closest and it will do tonight even though the food isn't the best," said Glenn. "I don't want to wander far in this kind of a fog."

"That suits me. Let's go."

The autumn night was raw, and there was a particularly chilling quality about the fog that permeated their clothes and struck through to the bone. Pulling up their coat collars, they plunged into the darkness, Bob in the lead.

An alley cut the block beside the Leitsweiler

Building, but there was so little chance of a car rushing out of it at night that neither Bob nor Glenn hesitated at the curb.

The first inkling Bob had of the danger that was upon him was a sharp cry from Glenn. Instinctively he jumped ahead, turning just enough so he caught the faint gleam of the lights of a taxi which had rushed at him from the blackness of the alley.

Bob's heart stopped. The lurching machine was almost upon him and the driver appeared to be staring straight ahead, unmindful of the fact that his machine was headed directly for Bob.

With a last despairing leap, Bob hurled himself headlong. He struck the alley with a jarring thud and rolled on over. Perhaps he imagined it, but as he scrambled up he had the distinct feeling that the taxi driver had made a last effort to swing the cab further toward him to make sure that the vehicle would strike him down.

In the faint glow of the dash lamp, little more than a glow of light in the fog, Bob glimpsed a mask-like yellow face staring at

him. The thin lips were pulled back over almost fang-like teeth and the eyes, little more than slits, leered at him evilly.

The cab lurched into the street, the motor roared as the driver tramped hard on the accelerator, and the vehicle sped away from the waterfront region.

"Are you hurt, Bob?" cried Glenn, leaping across the alley.

"Just bruised a little. Say, it looked like that fellow was deliberately trying to run me down."

"It certainly did. I'm sure he swung his cab toward you after you made your first jump. I never thought you'd make it. Man, but I lived ages during that second."

"So did I. Wish we could have gotten his number. I'd have turned in a complaint on him."

Glenn helped Bob brush off his clothes, for the alley where he had rolled was none too clean. Then they started down the street again.

"Did you see that chap's face" asked Bob as they reached the corner and turned toward the restaurant.

"Only a glimpse. He looked a little like an oriental. The skin was yellow and tightly drawn. Maybe he was scared."

"He wasn't scared," retorted Bob. "I was the fellow who was scared. As far as I'm concerned I never want to see him again, even in my dreams. It was sort of a mummified face, as though it had been worn several centuries. The lips were drawn back over his teeth and his eyes were like slits in a piece of dry skin. Gives me the creeps to talk about it."

"Then don't. Here's the restaurant. We'll see if we can find something appetizing on their menu."

The interior of the restaurant was cheerfully lighted, and a radio was tuned low. They selected a table near the rear. Only a few were in the restaurant at that hour and service was prompt. They ordered steak dinners and leaned back in their chairs to scan the evening papers, which a waiter placed on their table.

"Here's an item about the Great Northern Transportation Company," said Glenn. "It says their new liner, the *Atlantica*, will be

ready for its maiden voyage within a month."

"That's the ship the Great Northern people expect will make a new speed record for a North Atlantic run," said Bob. "That company is determined to bring the speed title back to the United States. The British held it for years and then the Germans took it away with the *Bremen* and the *Europa*. Well, I'm kind of glad that an Uncle Sam company has enough nerve to build such a ship. Here's hoping they break every record on the maiden voyage."

"I wonder if the visit of the vice president of the steamship company to Professor Pearson could have anything to do with the *Atlantica*?" mused Glenn, half to himself, but loud enough for his companion to hear him.

"That's an idea. You know, I've been wondering about the disappearance of that old tramp steamer, the *Red Wing*. That ship vanished in mid-ocean while on a voyage from Southampton to New York."

"Well, what about it? I haven't paid much attention to the story."

"Oh, there isn't much of a story. Just an-

other tramp ship gone to Davy Jones' locker I guess. The funny thing was that no one was able to learn of a storm anywhere in its vicinity when it went down."

"Maybe they sunk the old tub to get insurance," suggested Glenn.

"Hardly. In that case, at least one of the officers would have survived, but not a living soul who left Southhampton aboard the *Red Wing* has been heard from."

"How long ago did this happen?"

"A little more than a month."

"But how can you connect the disappearance of an old tramp ship with the call from the vice president of the Great Northern Company? Did they own the *Red Wing?*"

"I don't know. Call it a hunch if you like and let it go at that. We both know that Professor Pearson is often called in to advise on a good many mysteries the police never hear about."

"Or mysteries they can't solve," grinned Glenn. "I'm anxious to get a chance to work on a first class case with him."

"This may be our chance," said Bob.

"Here come the steaks, and do they smell good! Makes me realize that I'm just about starved. As soon as we're through we'll hurry back to the laboratory and finish work on the new 'mike'."

"And also try to learn what this night conference is about," grinned Glenn.

The large steaks and an ample supply of french fried potatoes with a huge vegetable salad soon appeased their appetites and they ate more leisurely. Bob had now thoroughly regained his composure after the narrow escape at the mouth of the alley, but he couldn't help thinking about it. That tense, drawn face of the driver of the cab kept coming back in his memory. Perhaps it was only the night and the denseness of the fog, but he felt uneasy.

Bob was facing toward the street when he saw that yellow face peering in at him. It was pressed against the window, the narrow eyes focused directly at him. Glenn sensed the sudden change in Bob's attitude and looked up to see his companion staring at the window. Glenn turned to follow Bob's gaze as he leaped to his feet and dashed for the door.

Bob's chair went over with a clatter that echoed through the restaurant. With long strides, he raced down the room. The few customers looked at him in amazement and a waiter, bill in hand, tried to intercept Bob, but he brushed the man away. Flinging open the door he plunged into the street.

The face at the window had disappeared. Bob looked in every direction, but there was no sign of a taxi nor could he hear footfalls of anyone running away. He looked a little sheepish as he returned to the table and picked up his chair.

"What under the sun is the matter?" asked Glenn. "Are you seeing ghosts?"

"It begins to look that way," admitted Bob. "But to tell you the truth I thought I saw that taxi driver looking in at me. In fact, I'm sure I did. I may be a little jumpy, but I wouldn't have imagined that."

"No, I don't think you would," conceded Glenn. "Any trace of him when you got outside?"

"Not a sign. The whole street was silent and deserted."

"Well, we'd better finish our meal. We'll keep on the lookout for this fellow on our way back to the lab."

"I've had enough food. Let's start back at once. I've a feeling that there's more behind the mysterious appearance of this yellow-faced chap than we know and we left the professor alone."

"The professor is perfectly capable of taking care of himself," said Glenn. "You've been working too hard on the new 'mike' and your nerves are jumpy, but I'll go back with you now if you'll feel any better."

Chapter III

Up the Stairs

The young scientists finished their meal at once. Bob paid the check and they ventured out into the night and the fog again. Instinctively Bob hesitated outside the door and peered up and down the street.

"Looking for the 'man with the yellow face'?" asked Glenn.

"You don't think I saw him?"

"I think your imagination is working overtime. Come on."

With Glenn in the lead, they left the aura of light created by the brightly lighted windows of the restaurant and plunged into the darkness of West Fourteenth Street. Behind them came muffled sounds from the Cunard pier where the rush of preparations to get the *Berengaria* ready for its midnight departure were nearing a peak. Up ahead the street was deserted.

The fog seemed even more dense and raw than when they left the laboratory and Bob anticipated getting out of the unpleasant night.

They walked slowly, careful not to make a mis-step or to stumble against any possible obstacle on the sidewalk. At the alleyway beside the Leitsweiler Building, Glenn walked boldly ahead while Bob paused for a moment. He cried out sharply as a cab leaped from the blackness.

This time it was Glenn's turn to jump frantically forward in an effort to dodge the vehicle. Bob's cry of alarm spurred him to a desperate effort and his powerful legs flashed out like pistons. Even then it was close; so close the front fender of the taxi struck one of his heels. It threw him off balance and he plunged heavily against the curb. Then the cab lurched into the street and roared away in the night.

Glenn had been unable to see the driver's face, but Bob caught just a fleeting glance. It was the same yellow face with the slit-like eyes which had stared at him through the window of the restaurant, the same face he had glimpsed

when the cab almost ran him down. The "man with the yellow face" was the driver.

Bob ran across the alley and bent over Glenn.

"Did he hit you?"

"Fender nicked my left heel and that threw me off balance. It's a wonder I didn't crack my skull against the curb, but I managed to turn just enough to take the brunt of the fall on my shoulder. Who was it?"

" 'The man with the yellow face'," replied Bob.

Glenn, groaning and rubbing his shoulder, sat down on the curb of the alley.

"Maybe if we wait here a while he'll come back and try to run over both of us at the same time."

"After what's happened, I'd say there'd be a fair chance," said Bob. "Now I guess you'll concede that I did see someone peering in the window while we were eating."

"You might have," admitted the cautious Glenn. "Say, what do you suppose that fellow is doing in the alley? Twice now he's come storming out just as we came along."

"That's not an accident. It's intentional. For some reason, this yellow-faced taxi driver would like to trundle his vehicle all over us. I can't say that's a plan to which I can agree as long as I'm conscious. Come on, let's get up to the lab at once. I've a feeling something mighty queer is going on around here and I want to make sure it hasn't been in the laboratory."

Bob reached down and helped Glenn to his feet. The private entrance to the laboratory was only a short distance and they walked rapidly toward it with Bob in the lead. He turned inside as a taxi whirled up out of the fog and stopped beside them. Both young scientists looked at it expectantly, half hoping they would see the face of the driver who had so nearly run them down in the alley. The expressions on their faces boded little good for the driver if they caught him.

A well dressed man of middle age, his coat collar turned up to ward off the chill of the night, stepped out of the cab and paid the driver.

"No need to wait for me," he informed the

driver. "I'll probably be here for some time."

A generous tip accompanied his payment of the taxi charge, and he turned toward the entrance to the laboratory. He appeared to know about the private elevator for he nodded at Glenn and Bob, brushed past them, and went to the wall telephone beside the shaft. Unless you had a key to unlock the elevator signal button, it was necessary to telephone to the laboratory. If the visitor was to be admitted, the elevator control could be released from the lab. The newcomer took the receiver off the hook and waited patiently for Professor Pearson to answer. There was no immediate reply and Bob stepped forward.

"I'm Bob Ellis, an assistant to Professor Pearson. Are you Gifford Crain?"

"Yes. I have an appointment with Professor Pearson."

"He told us about it before we left for a late dinner," said Bob. "This is Glenn Heath, an assistant like myself. We're going up at once and can save you some time. The professor's a bit absent minded and he may not hear your telephone signal for a few minutes."

The official of the Great Northern Transportation Company smiled.

"I'll be glad to go with you. On several occasions I've had to wait half an hour before the ringing of the telephone signal attracted the professor's attention."

Bob found the elevator key on his key ring and he inserted this in the lock on the outer elevator control. Once this was unlocked, he could press the button and bring the elevator down. When not in use, the lift was left half way between the first floor and the laboratory as a means of discouraging any unwelcome visitors who might be in quest of some of the valuable secrets housed in the lab.

Bob unlocked the control and pushed the button. The elevator would be down shortly and he turned toward the ship company official. Mr. Crain appeared to be about fifty-five, with dark hair and fine brown eyes that commanded attention and respect. Yet there were deep lines of worry around them.

Glenn was industriously brushing the dirt off his clothes.

"It's a treacherous night," said Mr. Crain,

noting Glenn's action. "Did you stumble and fall?"

"I fell, all right," nodded Glenn. "A taxi came cruising out of the alley just as I crossed and I had to jump to escape being struck. Strange part of it is that only a few minutes before on our way to the restaurant the very same thing happened to Bob. He said it was the same driver and cab."

"I know it was," put in Bob firmly. "I only had a glimpse of his face each time, but it was one I won't forget for a good many months."

"Taxis are entirely too careless," said Mr. Crain. "I had a narrow escape only a few blocks away. A car shot out of a cross street and almost rammed us broadside. Only quick work by my driver saved me from a bad accident."

"Did you get a glimpse of the other driver?" asked Bob intently.

"Only for a flash. It was an unusual face. Yellow, with strange, narrow eyes."

Bob fairly quivered with excitement.

"I knew it; I sensed it," he exclaimed.

"That's the same driver who tried to run down Glenn and me. Ever since you telephoned and Professor Pearson hinted that you wanted him to work on a mystery I've felt there was something unusual going to happen."

"I'm afraid the unusual has happened," replied Mr. Crain. "I must see Professor Pearson at once."

Bob turned to the elevator button and pushed it firmly. The car should have been down long ago. He leaned against the steel door which closed the front of the shaft and listened intently. There was no sound of the elevator, no humming of the cable or purring electric motor.

"Elevator must have burned out a fuse," he said. "There isn't a sound in the shaft."

"I'll try the telephone again," said the shipping magnate.

He tapped the receiver hook several times, but there was no answer from the laboratory to his signal and he abandoned the attempt to catch the attention of Professor Pearson in this manner.

Meanwhile, Glenn had been working at the

elevator control. He pushed the button carefully, listened for some sound to indicate that the elevator was moving in the shaft. From one pocket he drew a small tool kit and from this he extracted a sturdy little screwdriver. It was the work of less than a minute to unscrew the control plate and look at the wires. The connections were all right and the fuses on the switch appeared intact. Whatever the trouble was, it must be in the car itself.

Mr. Crain was growing impatient.

"Isn't there some other way we can reach the laboratory?" he asked.

"There's a private stairway," said Bob. "I'll walk up and see what's wrong with the elevator. If I can't fix it at once, I'll phone down and you can walk up.

Bob unlocked the door which gave access to the private stairway and started the long climb to the eleventh floor. This stairway was used only on rare occasions and there were no lights. He had to feel his way along in the dark. At every other landing there was a small window, but the thick fog outside obscured what little light usually filtered in.

Bob was in good physical trim, but a climb up eleven flights of stairs is enough to test the muscles and lung power of a top notch athlete and as he neared the top, Bob felt his breath coming in great gasps. On the ninth level he sat down to rest a minute. He had been climbing too rapidly. There was a window nearby and he unlocked the sash and raised it halfway. The air in the stairway was foul and he took deep breaths of the fog-ladened air. It refreshed him and gave him strength to continue the climb.

Closing the window and locking it, he started upward again, this time going at a little slower pace.

He reached the foot of the last set of stairs and looked upward toward the doorway which opened into Professor Pearson's private office. There was a line of light under the door and one spear of it crept through the keyhole.

Bob ascended the final flight of stairs and knocked firmly on the door. If the professor happened to be in his office he might hear him and admit him at once. It would save Bob

from fumbling around in the darkness trying to select the right key.

Bob knocked three times and when he failed to get an answer, pulled his key ring from his pocket. Just as he was about to insert the key in the lock, the light in the office blinked out.

"Professor Pearson," called Bob. "I'm at the top of the private stairway. Open the door and let me in. It's Bob."

There was no response and Bob decided the absent minded professor had returned to the laboratory after turning off the light in his private office.

He bent down and inserted the key in the lock. It turned easily and he grasped the handle of the door and pushed it open. The office was in semi-darkness, the only light coming from the great laboratory beyond.

Bob stepped into the office, then froze in his tracks. A startled cry tumbled from his lips as he stared into the narrow eyes of the "man with the yellow face." Before he could move, something struck his head and a mantle of darkness descended as he slumped unconscious to the floor.

Chapter IV

The Man with the Yellow Face

Down on the first floor Glenn went to work again on the elevator switch in the slim hope that he might be able to make the circuit function and bring the elevator down. Behind him Gifford Crain paced impatiently.

"Do you think anything's wrong up in the laboratory?" asked the shipping executive.

"Hardly. Professor Pearson's probably out in the main lab working over some project. When he's concentrating you could fire a cannon right beside him and I doubt if he would hear it."

"But your friend seems very much disturbed about this 'man with the yellow face.' "

Glenn chuckled. "Bob's a little imaginative."

"This fellow almost ran you down," Mr. Crain reminded him, "and a few minutes later

his cab almost crashed into me. Both of us were on our way to the laboratory."

"It's probably coincidence," insisted Glenn, who was too matter-of-fact to often become excited.

"I don't know about that. Some strange things have been happening here in New York tonight and out on the North Atlantic."

At the mention of the North Atlantic, Glenn looked up from his work.

"What's that?"

Mr. Crain smiled and shook his head. "That's a problem I'm reserving for Professor Pearson. It's tremendously important and I must see him at once. Don't you suppose your friend has reached the laboratory?"

"It's a long climb, but he should be there in a minute or two. I'll listen here at the shaft. The door from the stairway is beside the one which opens into the private elevator.

Glenn leaned down and placed his right ear over the crack in the doors which protected the shaft. The building itself was silent while outside there was only the dense fog in West Fourteenth Street.

There was no sound in the shaft, but Glenn listened intently. Mr. Crain remained close behind him.

Suddenly Glenn heard a faint noise. It might have been made by the opening of a heavy door, such as the one at the top of the stairway. Then there came a muffled cry. It was choked and far away but Glenn recognized Bob's voice. It was a cry of surprise, followed by terror.

Glenn wheeled away from the elevator. His face was pale but determined. Something was decidedly wrong in the laboratory for an alarming silence had followed Bob's outcry.

"Did you hear that cry?" Glenn demanded tensely.

Gifford Crain nodded.

"It was short, choked, but I heard it distinctly. I tell you something seriously wrong is going on up in that lab."

Glenn, his fingers fumbling in his haste, found the key which unlocked the lower door to the private stairway. He flung open the door and started up the eleven long flights of stairs with the shipping official at his heels.

Strong, capable Glenn soon outdistanced the older man, pounding up flight after flight of stairs, carried on by a growing fear. His breath came in great gasps as he neared the top and it seemed as though his lungs would burst with the searing pain which shot through them.

At the ninth floor level Glenn paused and threw up a window. He stuck his head out into the cool, damp air and sucked in great draughts of the invigorating oxygen. Behind him he could hear the laboring footsteps of Gifford Crain.

Two more flights and Glenn would be at the top, unlocking the door which opened into the bungalow laboratory. In another minute he would know the reason for Bob's startled cry when he had opened the door to the laboratory.

Glenn left the window up as he turned and raced up the last two flights of stairs. He had the key clutched in one hand for there was no time to lose.

Glenn reached the top of the last flight of stairs and bent over to insert the key in the

lock. With nervous fingers, he found the hole and jammed the key in.

The key went into the lock readily enough, but when Glenn attempted to turn it, the lock remained motionless.

There was no window at the top of the last flight of stairs and the faint glimmer of light that floated up from the top of the tenth floor was of little help. The shadows around him were dense.

Glenn pulled out the key and tried again, but there was no better fortune on the second attempt. He pounded lustily on the face of the steel sheathed door.

"Bob!" he cried. "Bob! Answer me!"

Glenn paused, hoping for some answering sound from the other side of the door, but there was no response to his calls.

Gifford Crain puffed up the final flight of stairs.

"Can't you get in?" he asked.

"The key won't turn in the lock," explained Glenn. "The tumblers are jammed someway."

"Let's try calling again."

Together they stood in front of the door, alternately beating their fists on the steel sheeting and then calling for either Bob or Professor Pearson.

"It's no use," said Glenn, finally. "Either they're not in the lab or—" He didn't finish the sentence. There was no need to. Gifford Crain understood.

"Isn't there any way we can batter this door down?" he asked.

"Not a chance. This was designed to stand off any kind of intruder. It would take a torch to cut around the lock and let us in and we haven't the time to hunt up a torch now."

"How about another entrance?"

"That's what I'm thinking about now," said Glenn. "There's an old entrance from another part of the building. It hasn't been used for years and doesn't lead directly to the lab. Its doors were on the roof and it was used before the lab was built."

"Isn't there a chance we would get up that way?"

"I doubt it, but we can try."

Glenn pulled the key out of the lock and

bent down in an attempt to see into the office. Only a small portion of the room was available, and what little illumination there was there indicated that the lights were on in the main lab.

Gifford Crain had started down stairs and Glenn was about to follow when he heard a slight noise in the laboratory.

Into the small area that was visible to Glenn crept the crouched figure of a man. His back was turned toward Glenn, but he knew that it was neither Professor Pearson nor Bob. The man was turning toward him and Glenn waited, afraid even to breathe.

A dull, cold shock drenched him with apprehension when he saw the face of the man in the office. The slit-like eyes of the "man with the yellow face" were staring at the door, drilling their way right through the keyhole and into Glenn's brain.

For a moment the young inventor was motionless. Then he gave vent to a shout and his fists beat against the door.

"Bob! Bob! Answer me!"

There was no change in the expression of

the "man with the yellow face." Later Glenn was to recall that vividly. The eyes were the same narrow slits and the lips parted in that half-smile that revealed the long teeth. There was no outcry from those thin lips. He only nodded his head and glided silently out of sight into the laboratory while Glenn pounded futilely upon the steel door.

Gifford Crain came storming back up the stairs.

"What's the matter?"

Glenn ceased his hammering upon the door.

" 'The man with the yellow face'!" he cried. "He's in the laboratory!"

Chapter V

The Dangling Rope

The vice president of the Great Northern Transportation Company pushed Glenn away from the keyhole and attempted to peer into the laboratory. He could see only a small portion of the office and there was no sign of the "man with the yellow face."

"Are you sure you saw someone?" he asked.

"Positive," replied Glenn. "He came out of the laboratory. At first I couldn't see his face, but when he turned toward the door I got a good look at him. I know I'm not mistaken. It's the same chap who drove the taxi that so nearly struck Bob and me."

"This thing is getting serious," said Mr. Crain. "We've got to get into the laboratory at once."

"The only hope right now is that we'll be

able to break through the old entrance which opens onto the roof," said Glenn.

The young scientist turned and plunged down the stairs. It was dangerous, to rush down so madly, in the darkness and the murk, but he was driven by a desperate fear. He took the steps two and three at a time. Once he lost his balance and tumbled forward, but he was near the bottom of the fifth flight and the wall saved him from a serious tumble. Somewhere behind him he could hear the pounding footsteps of the shipping official.

"Follow me into the main lobby of the building and then climb the service stairs," Glenn flung over his shoulder as he reached the first floor.

The private entrance was deserted and he hurried out into the street. The fog still shrouded the waterfront. If anything it was thicker than it had been. There was no one in the street and Glenn ran into the main lobby of the Leitsweiler Building.

Elevator service was not available after eight o'clock and he faced another long climb to the top floor. There was a watchman some place

around, but Glenn knew from previous experience that he could never be found in a hurry.

He threw open the door which led to the service stairway and started the long climb. This time he went at a little slower pace, for his heart was pounding wildly and his legs were a little shaky. Up and up he went, wondering desperately what had taken place in the lab in the last few minutes. Something must have happened to Professor Pearson and Bob for he knew the stranger had no business in that house of scientific secrets at that time of night.

There was an electric light at each landing along the service stairway and these dispelled some of the gloom of the night. Glenn finally reached the top landing. Above him was the one-time skylight which opened onto the roof. If they could get through that they would be able to reach the bungalow.

A ladder led from the landing to the skylight, which was of heavy glass, reinforced with strands of steel wire running through the glass. Glenn had no tools at hand which

would cut through the wires, but there was a chance he could smash his way through.

On the landing below he remembered seeing a heavy tank fire extinguisher which is common in all types of office buildings. If he could mount to the top of the ladder and swing the tank against the glass, he might be able to get through.

Glenn turned and raced down to the next landing, seized the fire extinguisher, and returned. It was heavy and clumsy to handle, but he started up the ladder with it. Before he reached the top Gifford Crain came puffing up the final flight.

"Steady the ladder!" cried Glenn. "I'm going to try to smash my way through this skylight."

Mr. Crain took hold of the ladder, which had been shaking dangerously and Glenn climbed up directly under the skylight.

"Look out for flying glass," he warned as he swung the heavy extinguisher upward.

The metal tank crashed into the glass, which rained down upon them. A section more than a foot square had been broken and Glenn

swung the heavy tank upward again. More glass cascaded down as he repeated the blows with the tank. He paused to survey the damage he had done. Half of the skylight was broken and many of the reinforcing wires had snapped under the blows.

He was about to resume the battering when a cry from Mr. Crain stopped him.

"Wait a minute, Glenn. It looks like there's a steel door above the skylight. I don't think we'll ever get through this way."

Glenn lowered the tank and looked up. Mr. Crain was right. A heavy steel door was just above the skylight. What a fool he had been not to remember. In making sure that the laboratory would not be molested, Professor Pearson had sealed the skylight with a heavy steel shutter. But in the excitement of the moment Glenn had forgotten this.

The door to the regular elevator shaft opened and the night watchman, gun in hand, stepped out.

"What's going on here?" he demanded sharply.

Glenn explained briefly.

"We've got to get into the laboratory. Our private elevator is jammed somewhere in the shaft and my key won't unlock the door at the top of our own stairway."

"Well, it's a fine thing to go around busting up property like this," declared the watchman, pointing toward the shattered skylight. "Why didn't you let me know?"

"We didn't have time to look for you," replied Glenn truthfully. "Have you got anything that will open this steel shutter?"

The night watchman pulled a flashlight from a pocket, mounted the ladder and surveyed the fastening of the shutter.

"I'm afraid not. This thing was put on to stay. It would take a high-pressure torch to cut through it. I've got a small one in the basement but it will take an hour to do the job."

"Then get your torch and start work," said Glenn. "In the meantime we'll see if we can find some other way to reach the roof."

"How about the fire escape?" suggested Gifford Crain.

"No chance there. It only serves the build-

ing proper and ends on this floor. I'm going down and see if I can get our own elevator to work."

With the night watchman operating the regular elevator, they descended to the first floor. Glenn and Mr. Crain stepped out there, while the watchman went down to the basement to get his torch and start work cutting away the fastening on the shutter over the skylight.

Glenn hurried out into the street with Mr. Crain close behind him. From the alley to their right an automobile motor rumbled furiously and gears clashed as though manipulated by an anxious hand.

Without a word, Glenn turned and raced for the entrance to the alley. The murk of the fog was still thick, but dim lights of an automobile were coming toward him. With a roar, a taxi shot into view, its driver huddled over the wheel.

Mr. Crain was beside Glenn when the cab reached the entrance to the alley. Lights from the entrance canopy of the Leitsweiler Building managed to pierce the fog that far and

both of them saw the driver plainly. He was the "man with the yellow face."

Glenn made a belated effort to leap aboard the cab, but he missed his jump by inches and narrowly averted falling under the rear wheels of the vehicle.

Mr. Crain leaned down and helped him to his feet.

"Hurt?" he asked anxiously.

"Just another bump or two, and with all of the others I've had tonight, one or two more won't make much difference. What do you suppose that chap is doing in this alley? I'm positive I saw him in the laboratory only a few minutes ago."

"If you did, that means he has some way of reaching the roof that we don't know about. He's the same fellow who almost ran his cab into mine while I was on the way down here."

"You've got to tell me why you are so anxious to see Professor Pearson," insisted Glenn. "All of these things have happened since you called and asked for an appointment."

"I'm afraid they're all tied up with my visit," admitted the official of the shipping

company, "but I haven't time to tell you the whole story now. We've got to find the professor and your friend first. There must be some entrance along the alley by which our mysterious friend reaches the roof."

Glenn hurried back into the building and went down to the basement where the night watchman was getting his torch ready. From him he borrowed a flashlight. Then he rejoined Mr. Crain in the alley.

"We'll make a thorough search just to satisfy ourselves."

With the beam from the flashlight making only a faint glow in the fog, they crept along the side of the building. Two doors which they tried were locked securely and gave no evidence of having been opened that night, for moisture from the fog was thick upon them.

When they reached the fire escape, a startled exclamation escaped from Glenn's lips. A rope, which could be used to pull the lower flight down within reach, was dangling before them.

Chapter VI

Alarming News

"I thought you told me it was impossible to reach the roof by the fire escape," exclaimed Mr. Crain.

"The steel ladder ends at the eleventh floor," said Glenn. "It's possible an extension of some kind was used."

They hurried back into the building, informed the watchman of their discovery, and all three boarded the elevator and shot upward to the eleventh floor.

The watchman unlocked the door which led to the top landing of the fire escape and Glenn stepped out into the night. He played the beam from the flashlight along the narrow iron runway. It revealed a rope ladder which dangled from the parapet above.

"That's how the 'man with the yellow face' reached the roof, do you dare try it?"

Glenn nodded grimly, handing the flashlight to the watchman. He tested the ladder thoroughly. It seemed fast at the top and he mounted it cautiously. A misstep might send him hurtling eleven stories into the alley below.

The ladder swayed dizzily, but he climbed determinedly and finally pulled himself over the edge of the parapet to tumble onto the roof. Ahead of him the lights of the laboratory blazed brightly.

He turned and leaned over the parapet.

"I'll either release the elevator and send it down for you or open the door at the top of the private stairway," he called. Then he turned and ran for the bungalow laboratory. A door leading from the main lab onto the roof was open and Glenn plunged inside.

"Professor Pearson! Bob!" he called.

But there was no answer. He had expected none, but the cries had been automatic.

Glenn hurried into the office. The papers on Professor Pearson's desk seemed to be about as they had been when he left the office only a little more than an hour before. In the

laboratory there was no sign of a struggle.

Glenn snapped on the lights which flooded the roof with light. There was no sign of a struggle out there, but he found a large coil of rope which had been tossed near the iron hooks which held the top of the rope ladder to the parapet. The rope was knotted as though it had been used to lower some heavy body over the edge of the roof.

From the head of the private stairway came a lusty pounding and Glenn ran back to the office. A special safety lock on the inside of the door had been snapped. He released this and the door opened readily to admit red-faced Mr. Crain and the curious night watchman.

"There's no sign of them," said Glenn, "but I found a rope at the edge of the roof. It looks as though they were lowered to the first landing on the fire escape. I know they wouldn't go of their own accord."

"Which means—"

"Which means they were undoubtedly unconscious. But I can find no sign of a struggle."

"There wouldn't be," said Mr. Crain, sinking into a chair.

"Hadn't I better turn in a call for the police?" asked the watchman.

Mr. Crain raised a hand.

"No. That's the last thing that must be done. We'll handle this through other means."

"Then you'd better tell me why you were so anxious to see Professor Pearson," said Glenn.

"In a few more minutes," promised the shipping official. He turned to the telephone and dialed long distance, placing a call for a number in Washington.

"I've got to get back to my rounds," said the watchman. "If you want me, you can ring the alarm from here."

Glenn looked down at the buzzer beside Professor Pearson's desk which would sound an alarm in the building.

"I guess not," he said, pointing to the instrument, which had been smashed by a well-aimed blow.

"Say, who's going to pay for the broken

skylight?" the watchman wanted to know.

"Don't worry about that. It will be taken care of," said Glenn sharply. "We'll call you when you're wanted again."

The watchman nodded and disappeared down the private stairway. Glenn closed and locked the door after him. Then went across the roof and pulled up the rope ladder.

"There've been enough visitors in this laboratory for one night," he said.

The long distance operator lost little time in putting Mr. Crain's call through to Washington. When she informed him the line was clear, he spoke eagerly.

"Department of Justice? I want Robert Quentin's office."

There was a short pause.

"Quentin?" asked Mr. Crain. Then he hurried on. "This is Crain. I'm talking from the office of Professor Pearson. I phoned him a little more than an hour ago for an appointment to present our problem to him. When I arrived I found that the professor and one of his young assistants had disappeared."

"Yes, that's right. I said they had disap-

peared. Vanished completely from the laboratory. Another of his assistants and I have just succeeded in breaking into the laboratory. There are no signs of violence, but we feel both of them were overcome and lowered over the roof to the fire escape. Where they were taken, we have no idea."

Mr. Crain paused, and Glenn caught jumbled phrases that poured in over the wire.

"You'll take a plane at once? Fine. We'll wait for you. Goodbye."

The shipping official hung up the receiver and turned back to face Glenn.

"Now I'll give you the explanation necessary," he said. "The Department of Justice is interested in this case and Robert Quentin, one of their best operatives, is leaving Washington at once by plane. He'll join us here as soon as possible."

"What have you gotten us into?" demanded Glenn tensely.

"I don't know, to be real frank, but I fear it is going to be an international mystery that will cause a world-wide sensation and now it all seems to be centered around this laboratory."

"But we've been working on nothing unusual," protested Glenn.

"I know, but Professor Pearson is considered the one man capable of solving what we fear is happening. In other words, he is the key."

"I'm getting into a terrible muddle," confessed Glenn. "Start from the first."

Mr. Crain leaned back in his chair.

"There isn't so much to tell. It's more what we fear is going to take place. Have you heard about the *Red Wing?*"

"You mean the tramp steamer that disappeared in mid-ocean?"

"Right. It disappeared when there was a storm nowhere within striking distance. There wasn't even a glimmer from her radio and not a living soul was ever found who could tell what happened."

"But ships have disappeared before," said Glenn. "That, in itself, is nothing remarkable."

"In this case it is. The *Red Wing* wasn't exactly the tramp steamer she seemed to be. That old ship had tremendously powerful engines and was being used to transport a sub-

stantial cargo of bullion from England to the United States. She was almost as fast as a trans-Atlantic liner, a seaworthy old ship, and one on which there would be little suspicion that bullion was being handled."

"Then you think there might have been a raid on the *Red Wing* for the bullion?"

"It's possible."

"But in that case the wireless could have been used for at least one flash."

"Not if someone aboard was in on the conspiracy and disabled the equipment. But that's a bit far-fetched. The fact is that the *Red Wing* with a safe full of gold worth more than $3,000,000 vanished without trace. What is infinitely more alarming is that one of the smaller ships owned by the Great Northern Transportation Company has not been heard from since early this morning."

"What!" exclaimed Glenn.

"The *Oracle*, one of our smaller vessels, hasn't answered radio calls since early this morning. Her last report was from a spot about 600 miles off the Irish coast. She was carrying more than a million in gold!"

Chapter VII

Treacherous Clues

Glenn could hardly believe his ears. The disappearance of a second vessel in the North Atlantic certainly could not be set down to mere coincidence, no matter what the cause might be.

"Then you're afraid the *Oracle* has met the same fate as the *Red Wing?*"

Gifford Crain nodded. "And we're not sure what happened to the *Red Wing*, except that the vessel and crew vanished completely, and with them went a fortune in bullion."

"Have you started a search?" asked Glenn.

"A government cruiser which was within 300 miles of the last reported position of the *Oracle* has been given secret orders to make a thorough search. The first reports should be coming through sometime after dawn."

Glenn looked significantly at the telephone and Mr. Crain smiled.

"You're wondering about the call to Washington? The gold on the *Red Wing* and that on the *Oracle* was consigned to the United States treasury, which gives the Department of Justice a very real interest. When I first became alarmed about the *Oracle*, I communicated with the Attorney General and the case was placed in the hands of Mr. Quentin, who is considered one of the smartest detectives in the world."

"You still haven't explained why you were so anxious to see Professor Pearson," persisted Glenn.

"It was only natural that with a first class mystery apparently ahead of us, I should turn to Professor Pearson. He has assisted our company on one or two other cases and I knew that with his brilliant mind and keen scientific ability I would have a valuable ally."

"You appear to be convinced that the disappearance of these ships is the work of some highly organized gang."

"I'm sure that some of the cleverest and

most resourceful scoundrels in the world are in this thing. Don't ask my reasons; call it only a hunch if you wish. But the Great Northern Transportation Company has bitter rivals who would like nothing better than to cripple us severely just before we put the *Atlantica* in service."

"You mean the new liner destined to break all ocean speed records?"

"Exactly," replied the shipping official wiping his brow with a large handkerchief. "In a month, the *Atlantica* will be ready for her maiden trip. If a number of our other vessels should disappear before that time, you can imagine the havoc that would create for our business. It might well mean the ruin of the company. That's why I so desperately need the aid of Professor Pearson."

"In that case, our 'man with the yellow face' may have a very important role in this mystery of the vanishing vessels," said Glenn.

"Right, of course. He must have been here on the roof almost as soon as it was dark. He probably observed your every movement. Perhaps he even overhead your conversations.

He must have, or otherwise he would not have descended again to the alley where he attempted to run you down."

"He's pretty cold-blooded," agreed Glenn, "but I'd like to have just one good chance to smash my fist against his jaw."

"If he continues as active as he was tonight you may have that opportunity," Mr. Crain assured him.

While Mr. Crain made another survey of the laboratory, methodical Glenn went over to the elevator. The upper control box had been shorted, thus rendering it ineffectual. He placed new fuses and the automatic starting device worked instantly. The lift would be ready to send down to the bottom of the shaft when the federal agent arrived from Washington. Two years before flying through the fog would have been an impossibility but with the new radio beacons to guide the airman down to a perfect landing, planes could travel in the densest fogs.

From along the waterfront came the hoot of the *Berengaria's* siren. It was a dismal farewell, for there was nothing in the night to con-

note good cheer. The mist was too thick to see even the short distance to the Cunard pier, but Glenn could hear the snorting of the tugs as they pulled the giant liner out into the Hudson.

Shortly after that he rejoined Gifford Crain in his inspection of the laboratory. Outwardly Glenn appeared unusually calm, but inside he was seething with emotion. Sometime, somehow he would again meet the "man with the yellow face" and that time would bring anything but good fortune to the victim of Glenn's deep-seated wrath.

A short piece of steel tubing stuck out from beneath one of the work benches. Glenn leaned down to pick it up, thinking it had rolled off the bench. He stopped suddenly, examining the piece of steel in his hands. It didn't belong on that bench. It was from the work table on the far side of the lab.

Glenn hurried over to a bright arc, one of the special lights used to simulate daylight in the lab. Careful not to destroy any fingermarks which might be on the steel he looked at it closely.

On one end he made a startling and exceedingly disturbing discovery. There was a wisp of hair and a little spot of dried, brownish material. Without making a test, Glenn knew that it was a drop of blood and that the hair was Bob's. It was plain that someone had struck the young inventor with the steel tubing as he entered the office. That accounted for the startled, choked cry Glenn had heard while listening at the bottom of the shaft. Bob probably never knew what hit him or recognized his assailant.

Glenn called Mr. Crain to his side.

"I've found the first real clue in our mystery," he said, pointing to the length of tubing. "This was used to knock out Bob. He must have been given a nasty blow. There's a bit of hair and a spot of blood on it. I've been careful to preserve any fingerprints."

"How do you suppose they got the professor?" asked Crain.

"That would be easy. He's so intent on whatever he is doing you can slip up beside him and stand for minutes on end without his knowing it. But why do you say 'they'?"

"It's only natural to suppose that several men helped in their abduction. It would be impossible for any one man to have carried them down the eleven flights of the fire escape, much less getting them from the roof here to the first landing."

"I'd say that at first it appears almost impossible," said Glenn, "but frankly, now I think one man did the whole thing. That rope over at the parapet is knotted at intervals which would give him excellent leverage if he was lowering something heavy over the roof."

"That something being——"

"Professor Pearson and Bob. Of course they were unconscious or else bound and gagged. It would have made little difference for they had to be helpless for him to succeed."

"You may be right," admitted Mr. Crain. "But getting back to the piece of tubing. Will we have to wait and send it to Washington?"

"Not at all. I can make tests right here in the lab for prints and probably do as good a job as a police expert or a Department of Justice agent. I'll see what I can locate with powder

and then take photographs of whatever we find."

To Glenn it was a welcome opportunity to busy himself while awaiting the arrival of the Department of Justice agent. Slipping on the coveralls which he wore when working in the laboratory, he busied himself at one of the tables. With special powder he carefully dusted the tubing to bring out any possible prints.

With an exclamation that brought Mr. Crain to his side he found one set clearly defined.

"These will photograph well," cried Glenn. "We can rush the finished prints to Washington by plane and it won't take long after that to know who our unknown friend is if he has ever had a police record of any kind."

"I'm afraid we'll find that he hasn't. This scheme of making ships disappear seems like the mad dream of a super-scientist. We're up against no ordinary run of crookdom in this mystery."

The telephone on Professor Pearson's desk in the office rang imperatively and Glenn hastened out of the laboratory to answer it.

"You're wanted," he called back to Mr. Crain, who joined him hurriedly.

When he had finished the conversation he turned to Glenn with a grim, harried expression on his handsome face.

"It's just as I feared. Our continued efforts to make contact with the *Oracle* by wireless have failed. The cruiser *Abernathy*, which was ordered to the scene, has found no trace of the *Oracle*, although it has not yet reached the location from which it last reported."

"How about weather conditions?" asked Glenn.

"There was a slight fog reported by the *Oracle* when it last communicated with us, but that has evidently disappeared for reports from the *Abernathy* failed to mention anything but clear weather."

"Is the sea rough?"

"Only a slight swell. A rowboat would be safe out in the mid-Atlantic in weather like this."

"But it's pretty evident that a vessel, laden with gold, is anything but safe," said Glenn, turning back to the lab where he planned to

photograph the prints on the steel tubing.

He took the tube into the dark room cabinet at one side of the lab where he adjusted the lights and the camera. Working swiftly and with expert hands, he soon had the desired photographs.

Next Glenn turned to a quick developer. In almost no time, the negatives were clear. They were dried hastily and Glenn hurried along with the printing.

Half an hour after he had started, the completed, dried prints were ready for their scrutiny.

One excellent set of prints, obviously of the right hand, was shown on the tube.

"If we can ever match those, we'll know who abducted your companion and Professor Pearson," said Crain.

Glenn scarcely heard him, for there was something strangely familiar about the prints before him. He turned and pulled several large sheets from a drawer beneath one of the tables. These were liberally covered with fingerprints which had been photographed and developed.

"Do you think you've got the answer there?" asked Mr. Crain, leaning close to Glenn.

"I'm afraid I have," conceded the young scientist, pointing to the prints he had taken from the steel tube and a set on one of the sheets he had taken from the drawer. "They belong to Bob."

"Impossible. Bob couldn't have made the prints on that tube."

"Not willingly. But the man who struck him down with this could have wiped off his own prints and then made sure that Bob's were on it by placing the tubing in Bob's hand for a minute."

Gifford Crain nodded slowly.

"Why it's diabolical."

"It's all of that," agreed Glenn grimly. "Well, what we thought was our first clue has certainly vanished. We're back at the starting point."

Chapter VIII

Quentin Arrives

The official of the Great Northern Transportation Company looked ruefully at the fingerprint photograph before him. It was disappointing to learn how they had been tricked, but fortunate that Glen had recognized something familiar in the prints.

The young scientist dropped into a chair. The strain of the events which had taken place had told heavily upon him.

"I feel so helpless," he said. "I don't know where to turn, how to start looking for the professor and Bob."

"That's why I sent for Robert Quentin. He's the best man hunter in the United States."

Mr. Crain glanced at his wrist watch.

"He should be along within the hour," he added.

Glenn rose and went back to the office.

Turning on every light, he started a careful scrutiny of every piece of furniture in the room in the hope that somewhere he might find a tell-tale fingerprint. He dusted powder on many of the objects. There were scores which he knew belonged to the professor, Bob, or himself, but on none of them could he find strange prints. At last he gave up the search.

"I'm going to order a lunch sent up for us," said Mr. Crain and Glenn agreed that something hot would taste good. A nearby restaurant was telephoned and when the signal from below was sent up, Glenn went down in the elevator and brought up the tray of food. Hot sandwiches and coffee warmed him and gave him new strength. As soon as the Department of Justice agent arrived, he would be ready to start on the trail of the abductors of the professor and Bob.

Mr. Crain seemed confident that Robert Quentin would be able to find the right trail, but Glenn was not as certain. The kidnaping of the scientists from the office had been done so quietly and cleverly that it was plain they were up against a brilliant mind.

It was well after three o'clock and New York was slumbering fitfully when the elevator signal buzzed again. Glenn took the car down and opened the door on the first floor to greet a trim, quiet appearing man of about thirty-five.

"I'm Robert Quentin," said the stranger. "Mr. Crain asked me to meet him here as soon as I reached New York."

"I'll take you up at once," said Glenn. "I'm Glenn Heath, one of Professor Pearson's assistants. My companion, Bob Ellis, is also missing."

"That's what Mr. Crain phoned me. Anything more heard from the *Oracle?*"

"No. Mr. Crain made a call some time ago, but no further word has been received. The *Abernathy* is near the place where the *Oracle* last reported, but has no hopeful news."

The Department of Justice agent shook his head, his blue eyes hardening.

"I don't like the looks of it," he said. "This thing is likely to have international complications before we're through."

They reached the bungalow and Glenn

opened the elevator doors. Mr. Crain rushed up to greet the federal agent.

"Bad flying weather?" he asked.

"Rotten. Fog all of the way and we couldn't make the usual speed. Well, let's have the detailed story."

Glenn noticed that Mr. Quentin's eyes had taken a mental photograph of the bungalow, probing into the laboratory.

"As soon as I learned the *Oracle* had failed to send in its hourly report, I recalled what had happened to the *Red Wing*," began Mr. Crain. "With more than a million in gold consigned to the treasury aboard the vessel, I became concerned at once. You know about my call to the Attorney General?"

Quentin nodded. "Go on."

"The more I thought about it, the more convinced I became that this possible disappearance of the *Oracle* might be a deliberate plot to discredit our line just before we place the *Atlantica* in service. If that should happen, we might be ruined."

"I can understand that readily enough," agreed the federal agent.

"Then it was only logical for me to turn to Professor Pearson for advice. He has helped us on several other cases and I knew that if there was anything science could do to protect us, he would be the man."

"So you got in touch with him and made an appointment?"

"Exactly."

"And before you could reach him, he disappeared and at the same time one of his assistants vanished?"

"They were overpowered in some fashion, then lowered over the parapet to the top flight of the fire escape, and carried down to the alley. We're sure they were taken away in a taxi driven by a man with a peculiar yellow face. In fact, it's so unusual we've come to call him 'the man with the yellow face'."

"There's no question about that," put in Glenn. "When we knew something was wrong, Bob came up the private stairway. He reached the top all right for I could hear the door open."

"Where were you?"

"On the first floor trying to get the elevator

control circuit to work. I was near the shaft and could hear distinctly."

"Then what happened?"

"There was a sort of choked cry. That was all. But I knew Bob was in trouble. I raced to the top of the stairs and tried to open the door, but the lock had been snapped on the inside and my key was useless. I bent down and looked through the keyhole. Someone came in from the laboratory and when he turned toward me I saw this man with the strange face. I know I wasn't mistaken for I had seen him twice before. He was driving a cab and he tried to run over both Bob and me at the entrance to the alley."

"A man answering the same description almost crashed into my cab when I was on my way here," interjected Mr. Crain.

"Then it looks like this stranger might hold the clue to the mystery of the disappearance of your friends," said Quentin, looking directly at Glenn.

"There's no doubt about it. When we finally realized we couldn't get to the lab either by the regular stairway or through an old en-

trance, we turned to the alley and were just in time to see him drive away in a cab. I'm convinced that both the professor and Bob were in the cab at that time."

"Why didn't you give chase?"

"There wasn't a cab within hailing distance and pursuit in the fog would have been hopeless."

"Of course. I'd forgotten the fog for the moment."

"We found a rope which had been used to pull the last section of the fire escape down. When we reached the top we discovered the rope ladder by which access had been gained to the roof."

"Any other clues?" the federal agent nodded toward the photos of the fingerprints.

"Only disappointing ones," explained Glenn. "I found a section of steel tubing which had been used as a club to knock Bob out. I dusted it off for prints and took a photo, but it turned out the only prints were those of Bob."

"Meaning that the man who had used the

tubing had wiped off his own and made sure that only Bob's were left?"

"It looks that way."

"Let's make a complete tour of the lab and roof."

With Glenn explaining everything about the lab, what experiments were under way at the time, and about the private elevator and stairway, they went out onto the roof. The federal agent made a close inspection of the rope ladder.

"Looks to me like this was obtained from a ship," he commented, turning it over in his hands while Glenn held a powerful electric light.

"If it was it bears out my fear that the disappearance of the *Oracle* is a step aimed just to cripple our line," said Mr. Crain decisively.

"Remember that Uncle Sam has something more than a million in gold that he doesn't want to lose," added Quentin.

The telephone in the office rang sharply and Glenn hurried away to answer it. The call was for Mr. Crain, who joined him at once. It was evident from the expression on the face

of the shipping executive that the message was anything but encouraging.

His face looked older, heavier, as he eased himself into the large chair which was Professor Pearson's favorite.

"The line has just had another message from the *Abernathy*," he explained. "The cruiser has reached the spot where the *Oracle* last reported and there is no sign of the ship."

"No wreckage?" asked Quentin.

"Nothing."

"But ships don't disappear like that in calm weather."

"That's what we all said when the *Red Wing* vanished. Of course it's impossible, but ships are disappearing. The newspapers will have the story in a few minutes. It can't be kept secret much longer."

To this the federal agent agreed.

"We've got to work fast. I'm leaving at once. Every ship, train, plane and car leaving New York will be watched for Professor Pearson and his assistant. We'll put out an air-tight dragnet. After that's done, I'll return here and we'll map out our other plans.

Suppose you rejoin me here at ten o'clock?"

Mr. Crain agreed and stepped into the elevator.

"Isn't there something I can do?" asked Glenn.

"Get a little sleep," smiled Quentin. "You look about all in. Better stay right here at the lab. We'll be back in a few hours."

After they left the elevator on the first floor, Glenn brought the car back to the top, made sure that it could not be operated from the bottom, and then made a thorough inspection of the roof and the lab. He picked up the rope ladder, took it inside, and stowed it away in a locker where it would be handy if needed for inspection.

Questions were pounding through his mind, but his body fatigue forced him to finally give up and stretch out on a couch in the office.

Thought of the *Red Wing* and the *Oracle* loomed large. How had those vessels been made to disappear? What had happened to their crews and to the bullion which they had carried?

Then Glenn's mind switched back to the happenings of the evening. The strange-looking driver who had tried to run them down at the mouth of the alley, the startled cry from Bob as he entered the lab, the disappearance of his friend and the professor and the finding of the rope ladder leading from the fire escape to the roof. All of these were perplexing and as yet unanswered, but before he finally dropped into a heavy sleep Glenn resolved that before many days elapsed, he would know the key to most of them.

For the first few minutes he turned restlessly in that dark hour which is just before the dawn. Then his nerves relaxed and he drifted into a deep sleep, a rest so sound that he failed to hear a slight thump on the roof or the cautious crunching of footsteps as someone advanced over the rough gravel of the tar roof.

A door which led from the lab to the roof opened and the man with strange, yellowish face peered in. He was of medium height, but broad of shoulders and with large hands that tapered strangely at the fingers. A cap, pulled well down over his forehead, revealed only

the slit-like eyes and the face more than ever resembled a mask for there was no expression as he glided across the laboratory and into the office. In one hand he held what looked like a gun.

When he neared the couch on which Glenn slept there was a soft "thrutt" from the weapon in his hand and a cloud of mist formed. A slight draft carried it toward Glenn while the intruder watched, alert as though afraid someone he had not expected might be hiding in the laboratory.

Glenn turned, taking a deep breath of the fog-like gas which now surrounded him. Something in it seemed to irritate him for he stirred restlessly and even made a motion as though to rise. Then he dropped back on the couch.

The intruder nodded his head as though satisfied, advancing to the couch where Glenn lay. The gas which he had shot from his gun seemed to have no effect upon him, for he bent over Glenn and picked him up in his arms. He was turning toward the lab when some sound from the edge of the roof caused him to pause.

Instantly he dropped Glenn on the couch and leaped toward the doorway through which he had entered.

As the night waned, the fog was thinning and it was light enough now to see the figure of a man scrambling over the edge of the roof. The stranger slammed the door of the lab, turned and raced back into the office. There he paused only enough to jerk open the door of the elevator. Running back to the couch he fairly dragged Glenn across the floor and into the elevator, where he dropped him in a heap. Then he pulled the doors and touched the control just as Robert Quentin, gun in hand, burst into the office.

Chapter IX

SHANGHAIED

WHEN Bob Ellis regained consciousness it was to awake with a head that felt about three sizes too large. The blood pounded through his veins and he ached all over as though a street roller had run over him two or three times.

The last thing he could remember was the surprise of coming suddenly upon the "man with the yellow face" in Professor Pearson's office. There had been the brief moment of recognition and then a rocking blackness that had been filled with constellations and all kinds of pains.

Bob opened his eyes slowly. The air was close and stuffy and the room he was in vibrated strangely. There was no light and he raised himself up on one elbow. His aching head cracked into the ceiling and he fell back on the hard bunk on which he was resting.

For a time he remained motionless, trying to puzzle out what had happened since he had been struck down. The vibration and the movement of the room he was in troubled him. From a distance came the sound of an engine, moving rhythmically and it was then that Bob realized he was aboard a ship.

Shanghaied! The thought flashed through his mind and he rose quickly, only to bump his head again.

The next time Bob rolled over the edge of the bunk and swung his feet down. It was a good five feet to the steel floor for there was another bunk beneath the one in which he had been tossed.

With eager hands, Bob felt his way around the room. There was a porthole, but it was closed and shuttered so that no ray of light could creep in from the outside. He found a door, but it was locked and even the keyhole had been plugged.

The trip around the room had given Bob some idea of his quarters. There were double bunks on each side of the narrow cubby and it was toward these that he turned his attention.

He was about to sit down on one of the lower bunks when a slight groan brought a new tingle of apprehension surging through him. Someone else was in the room!

Bob drew back from the bunk and crouched near the door. At least he would be ready for a surprise attack.

There was a slight movement from the lower bunk and another sort of moan. Someone mumbled aloud, "Oh, my head!"

Bob chuckled.

"Hello, Glenn," he said in a low voice.

"Bob, is that you?"

"None other and none such and what a headache I've got."

"Me too. Say where are we and who put out the lights?"

"I'll answer that question if you'll answer a few of mine. One thing I do know. We're aboard a ship."

"What's that?" Glenn was struggling out of the bunk.

"Listen to the steady pounding of that engine if you don't think we're at sea," said Bob. "Also, I found a porthole a few minutes ago

while feeling my way around the room."

"But we can't be. It was only a few minutes ago when I laid down on the couch in the office to go to sleep. We'd been wondering for hours what had happened to you and the professor."

"I'm still wondering. The last thing I remember was opening the door of the office and staring into the eyes of the 'man with the yellow face'."

"Well, I know something of what happened to you after that. You were tied up and lowered over the edge of the roof to the fire escape. Then you were carried down the fire escape and put in a taxi. The same thing had happened to the professor, but I wish I knew what happened to me."

"Sorry I can't help you out. All I know is we're shanghaied aboard some unknown ship and in a tough spot. Where's the professor?"

"I wish I knew and so does Uncle Sam."

"How does he figure in on this?"

Glenn recounted briefly the story of the disappearance of the *Oracle* and how the Depart-

ment of Justice had assigned Robert Quentin to assist in solving the mystery.

Bob gave a low whistle, a sure sign that he was tremendously interested.

"Looks like we were right in the center of a rip-snorting mystery. Gosh, but I wish I knew who the 'man with the yellow face' is."

"That's probably the key to the whole thing," admitted Glenn. "I'm still going in circles. I'd give almost anything for a drink of water."

He started to get up, but one leg was numb and he pitched forward into the other lower bunk opposite his own. Bob heard a choked cry from Glenn.

"What's the matter? Hurt?"

"No. Scared to death. There's someone in this bunk."

Bob felt his way toward Glenn.

"Stay where your are. I'm coming."

"Listen!" whispered Glenn. "You'll hear him breathing very gently."

Glenn was right. Bob could hear the faint but regular breathing of a man asleep.

"Got a match or flashlight?" asked Bob.

"No such luck."

"Well, I'm not going to sit around here waiting to see who it is. I'll see if there are any matches in his clothes."

"He may wake up and start a fight," warned Glenn.

"Well, it's two to one. You be ready to give him a clout if he makes trouble."

Bob leaned over the bunk and with light but expert hands started going through the pockets of the unknown.

"Here's a box of matches," he whispered to Glenn. "I'm going to strike one. You be ready for fast action if anything is needed."

Glenn saw his companion draw the match across the box, but the first one failed to ignite. The second attempt succeeded and the splinter of flame brought light into the darkness that had blinded them.

Both young scientists were speechless as they looked down on Professor Pearson, who was still asleep.

"Pinch me," said Bob. "I must be dreaming."

"There's no mistake. We're all three of us

bottled up in this little room where we'll probably do nothing to interfere with the group which is plotting the financial ruin of the Great Northern Transportation Company," said Glenn. "Diabolically clever, I'd say."

Bob struck another match and leaned close to Professor Pearson. He was apparently uninjured and this time he stirred restlessly.

"I think he'll waken soon. We'll wait until he does," decided Bob.

They sat down on the other bunk to await the return to consciousness of the famous scientist. The engine throbbed steadily and the vessel seemed to be pitching a little more than before.

"Must be a small boat," said Glenn. "The big ones don't have so much roll to them."

From the other bunk came restless movements and finally a low moan.

"Professor Pearson," said Bob. "Wake up."

"That you, Bob. Turn on the lights and get me a glass of water, I've got a pounding headache."

"I can't turn on the lights," replied Bob. "We've been shanghaied and are aboard some

kind of a boat. Glenn is here with me and be careful when you sit up or you'll bump your head on the bunk above."

"But I don't remember leaving the laboratory," protested the scientist.

"Neither do I," said Bob, "but Glenn tells me we were trussed up in a rope and lowered over the edge of the roof to the fire escape. After that we were carried down to the alley and taken away in a taxi."

"What happened to you, Glenn?"

"That's what's puzzling me. I lay down for a nap and the next thing I knew I woke up here with a headache."

"Unusual. Most remarkable. Connected with the Great Northern case, of course."

"It looks that way," said Glenn. "Mr. Crain was tremendously worried when you and Bob disappeared and he called in Robert Quentin of the Department of Justice."

"That was the proper course. Quentin will lose no time in attempting to find us. What are the latest developments on the ocean mystery?"

"You mean about the disappearing ships?"

"Right."

"The last one to vanish was the *Oracle* of the Great Northern line. She was carrying more than a million in gold consigned to the United States treasury."

"I knew something like that had happened."

"Mr. Crain must have given you the news when he telephoned," said Glenn.

"Not a word. He only said he wanted to see me at once on an important matter, but after the disappearance of the *Red Wing* with the fortune in gold aboard her I knew it must be something similar. The Great Northern Company has some very bitter rivals who will stop at nothing to obtain their end, which in this case is the financial destruction of Mr. Crain's company."

"So they abducted us, just to keep you from lending him a hand," added Bob.

"No question about it. But we'll be back on the scene of the trouble before long."

"How can we? We don't know where we are, what ship we are on, or where we are going," said Glenn, whose head was pounding as though it would split. He would have given

ten dollars for a cool drink of water just then.

"I don't know now, but something will turn up. Looks like company is coming."

A key rattled in the door, the lights, controlled from a switch outside, came on and blinded them. Then the door opened and a medium-built, dark-haired man with olive skin and shiny black eyes stepped inside. His right hand remained in his coat pocket, suggesting that he might have a weapon there in case his guests decided to make trouble.

Bob and Glenn had leaped to their feet, but he motioned them down with a wave of his hand.

"Please be seated. We have much to talk over and I know you are all tired and have aching heads."

"Are you the fellow who swatted me?" demanded Bob belligerently.

"Perhaps," smiled the visitor, but there was not humor in the shifting, black eyes. "Sit down!" The words snapped from his lips and Bob and Glenn sat down on the bunk opposite Professor Pearson.

"We might as well come to an understand-

ing right now," said their unwelcome guest. "You're going on a long, long voyage and you're all going to behave. Get me?"

He looked at them with questioning eyes, but there was no response.

"Understand?" the words cracked through the tiny room.

"I heard you the first time," said Glenn, "but mister if I wasn't afraid of what you've got in your pocket, I'd take you all apart just to see what makes you go around."

The dark-haired man laughed bitterly.

"I believe you would, at that. I'll see to it that you don't get a chance."

"Where are we going?" asked Professor Pearson, whose head still whirled dizzily.

"South America, and we're taking our time. It will be two weeks before we reach our first port of call and at least two months before we're ready to release you."

"But you can't keep us that long," protested Bob. "You'll be traced and apprehended."

"I don't think so," replied the other coolly.

"Now I've got a proposition. It isn't pleasant

in this room and I have no desire to cause you undue discomfort. If you'll all give me your word that you will make no attack upon members of the crew, I'll give you the run of the ship, but the first time you make a misstep, I'll clap you all in irons and have you thrown in the stock-hold where you can sweat your lives away."

He looked at them expectantly. "Think it over. I'll be back in a few minutes."

He stepped outside, quickly locked the door, and snapped off the lights.

"That fellow's got lots of nerve," said Bob, "But I guess the only thing to do is to accede to his plan."

"It would be foolish to attempt to overpower the crew," decided Professor Pearson. "We'll be under constant watch and right now I'd like nothing better than a breath of pure, fresh air."

"Then we agree," said Glenn. "But remember this. He said nothing about the radio. We are not honor bound on that point. If we can send a message from here in some manner we will not have broken our word."

It was several minutes later when the lights came on and their captor reappeared.

"We have decided to give you our word that we will not attack any members of the crew in an attempt to escape," said Professor Pearson. "Of course that cannot hold good if an outside attempt is made to help us."

"There will be no outside attempt made. You'll never be traced. You were all three taken down New York harbor in a fast speedboat and placed aboard this vessel while it was beyond the twelve mile limit."

The dark-haired man opened the door and stepped back. They struggled to their feet. Professor Pearson was still extremely weak and Bob and Glenn supported him as they stepped out of the tiny room in which they had been confined.

They reached the main deck in time to see the sun far down on the western horizon. There was a fresh wind and the long rollers were tipped with white, but the invigorating air gave them new strength and cleared their heads.

A name printed on a life preserver informed

them that the vessel was the *Truant*. It was a small tramp of not more than 4,500 tons, badly in need of paint and run down in every other respect.

Glenn turned around and gazed up at the bridge. The man who had released them was up there, looking down at them with a quizzical expression in his eyes. Beside him an officer, tarnished gold braid upon his cap, slouched over the rail. This man Glenn took to be the captain and it later developed that his surmise was correct.

For half an hour they remained at the rail, watching the sun sink below the horizon and filling their bodies with a new supply of badly needed oxygen.

It was dusk when the dark-haired man reappeared.

"It's time to eat," he informed them. "You'll have your meals in the officers' mess."

They followed him to the upper deck. On the way they passed the wireless room and through the open door Glenn glimpsed the operator hunched over his set. He had a working knowledge of wireless telegraphy and

the outfit aboard the *Truant* appeared to be unusually powerful for a craft of that size. It would have been foolish to have made a break then and attempted to flash a message, but Glenn was determined that within the coming hours he would accomplish it.

Chapter X

In A Tough Spot

Five sat down for dinner that night in the officers' mess. At the head of the table was the dark-haired man, who introduced himself as MacRae.

"No first name needed," he smiled. A red-faced, weak looking man in the uniform of an officer was introduced as Captain Otto. He mumbled a greeting and busied himself with his food. It was very evident that he was in fear of the power and cruelty of his super-cargo.

The food was served by a boy, a sullen-faced lad of about seventeen. He shoved it before them with little courtesy, but that failed to take the edge off their appetites.

The sharp sea air had blown away their headaches and they ate with real zest. The food was plain, but well cooked and seasoned

and there was plenty of everything that was placed before them.

Captain Otto was the first one through. Without speaking to his unwilling passengers he pushed his chair back and returned to the bridge.

"Captain Otto's a little uncommunicative," smiled MacRae.

"Maybe he's a little bit scared," suggested Glenn.

"That's possible. It would be embarrassing if a coast guard vessel should heave along side and find you aboard. Of course Captain Otto would have to do the explaining."

"How about you?" Bob wanted to know.

"Oh, I'm just a passenger going to South America for my health."

"It may not be very healthy when Uncle Sam's agents catch up with you," said Professor Pearson firmly. "It is foolish to think you can get away with this."

The black eyes snapped as MacRae leaned toward them.

"So that's what you think? Well, let me tell you something. The men running this game

are too smart for the Department of Justice or any half-baked professor who thinks he can dabble in criminology. They're out to make millions and they're going to do it."

"Talk is cheap," retorted Professor Pearson sharply. "You may have removed me temporarily, but I can assure you that your plans to ruin the Great Northern Transportation Company before the *Atlantica* can become the queen of the ocean will go astray. Other men are equally capable and they will leave no stone unturned to solve the mystery of the ships which have disappeared in mid-ocean."

MacRae laughed bitterly. "That's the only thing we're afraid of. You were the one man who might have stumbled on our secret. You're smart enough and you have the imagination to guess at what we are doing. The other experts they'll call in will fail miserably."

He paused for a moment. Then went on. "I'll tell you this: Our plan is ridiculously simple. I'm surprised that you haven't guessed what it is."

"Perhaps I have," countered the scientist.

MacRae's dark eyes glowed and Glenn felt a shiver run along his spine.

"Write it on a slip," MacRae urged the professor. "I'll tell you if you're right."

"I'm not quite that rash. If I should be right, you'd make way with me in a hurry."

"I'll force you to talk."

"Impossible." Professor Pearson's voice was still low, but there was a ringing quality of finality in it that convinced MacRae that no possible torture could wring any words from the scientist.

They finished their meal and MacRae ordered them to follow him. They went below deck where the small room which they had occupied was located.

"I'm not going to chain you in," said MacRae, "but if you start any funny business we'll keep you in this room until the end of the trip and you'll only have bread and water."

With that warning he closed the door and snapped off the light.

Professor Pearson and Bob took the lower bunks while Glenn pulled himself into the upper one.

"Well, what do you think of it?" asked Bob.

"I'd say we were in a tough spot," replied Glenn.

"There is little we can do," put in Professor Pearson, "except to hope that Robert Quentin will get on the trail of this ship in some fashion that seems to be known only to him."

"I'm not going to wait for Quentin," said Glenn. "South America may be a fine place for a fellow's health, but this isn't a vacation and I'm not going there."

"You're certainly headed that way," Bob chided him.

"Did you happen to notice the radio room?" asked Glenn.

"I only got a glimpse. Seemed like they have a mighty high-powered set for a ship of this size."

"Of course. That enables them to keep in touch with the gang's headquarters no matter where the ship happens to be. If I could only get my hands on that key for about ten seconds."

"MacRae would shoot you if you made any attempt to reach the cabin."

"Oh, I'm not going to make a fool break. But I am going to keep on the lookout and see if anything turns up."

While Bob and Glenn had been talking, Professor Pearson had been puzzling over the apparent ease with which he had been overcome in his laboratory.

"It was gas of some kind," he said, half to himself and half to the others.

"Just how did you lose consciousness?" he asked Glenn.

"I was asleep," replied his assistant. "Whatever happened was either too quick or too quiet for me to waken. I haven't any bruises on the head, but I did have an infernal headache."

"So did I. It must have been a new type of gas that renders the victim unconscious instantly, but inflicts no permanent harm. There are several. I wonder just what they used."

"Well, I'll be satisfied not to get another shot of it," said Glenn.

Worn out by the strain of the recent events and lulled by the roll of the ship, they pulled their blankets up and were soon sound asleep.

Hours later Glenn awoke. Since the port-

hole was shuttered, there was no way of telling whether it was day or night. The ship still rolled along steadily.

Glenn slipped out of the bunk. Professor Pearson and Bob were breathing deeply, indicating the soundness of their sleep. Glenn had plotted out a little plan and he set about putting it into action.

Creeping close to the door, he listened for some sound to indicate there might be a guard on duty outside. Some minutes elapsed before there was a scraping sound as though someone had tilted back in a chair. It was nearby and Glenn put his lips to the keyhole and groaned softly.

The chair thudded down, and Glenn knew he had attracted the attention of his guard.

He repeated the low groan and heard someone shuffle up to the door. A key was inserted in the lock and the door was opened cautiously. A faint light trickled in, revealing Glenn doubled up on the floor and moaning softly. From the corner of one eye he saw the guard shift his revolver from his right to his left hand and lean toward him.

That was the signal for Glenn. He sprang up from the floor like a coiled spring, his right fist catching the astonished guard on the point of the chin before he could cry out.

The smack of the blow resounded through the tiny room and Glenn reached out to catch the unconscious body of the guard. The noise had awakened Bob, who was out of his bunk in a flash.

"I've knocked out the guard and have his gun," whispered Glenn. "Help me lift him into the bunk."

Bob lent a willing hand and they then awoke the professor.

"Smart work, Glenn, he said. "Do you think we can make the radio room?"

"Depends on whether it is guarded. We'll try. Follow me."

They slipped out of the room which had been their prison, locking the door behind them.

Only a dim light glowed in the corridor and they passed under this without detection and made their way to the main deck. Ahead and above were the lights of the bridge and back

of that was radio room. It was going to take fast work to get in there, overpower the operator and flash out a message before other members of the crew made the discovery.

Chapter XI

"Man Overboard!"

Glenn led the way toward the upper deck. In his right hand he gripped the revolver he had taken from their guard. Bob and Professor Pearson crowded close behind him.

"If the alarm is given, scatter," whispered Glenn. "One of us may be able to reach the radio room during the excitement."

They crept toward the upper deck. At the head of the stairs a light glowed dully and they would have to pass beneath that. It was the most dangerous part of their journey.

Glenn took a deep breath and leaped upward. He made the upper deck and dashed across the patch of light into the darkness beyond.

Bob followed him without detection. They waited breathlessly for the professor. They saw his head appear at the top of the stairs. He

rushed toward them, but just before he reached them he stumbled and fell headlong. The noise attracted the attention of the bridge and lights flashed on, revealing their position.

MacRae came charging out at them, tugging at his coat pocket. Glenn dropped to one knee, took quick aim, and fired. The impact of the bullet spun MacRae around and dropped him on the deck, a slug grazing his left shoulder. But others were following MacRae and the radio operator, armed, appeared in the doorway of his room.

"Get them, get them," MacRae was screaming.

The radio operator obeyed the command, leveling his gun at Bob, who was helping Professor Pearson to his feet. The scientist appeared dazed and was in no condition either to run nor make a fight.

Glenn, still on one knee, took a quick shot at the radio operator. He missed but was close enough to give the radio man a bad scare. He leaped back into his room and slammed the door.

Professor Pearson was badly shaken. Flight

for him was impossible and Glenn knew that Bob would never desert his superior. If their break from their room was to come to anything it was up to him. A wave of men rushing up from below decks and in a few more seconds they would be overpowered.

Glenn ran around to the other side of the radio room. It was darker there and he was nearer the railing. A trailing rope caught his attention and in a moment a daring plan flashed through his mind.

He ran to the rail. It was possible and worth the attempt.

The sound of pursuit came nearer and the first men burst around the corner of the radio room just as Glenn, poised on the railing, plunged down. As he fell he heard the sharp cry, "Man overboard!"

But Glenn did not fall into the ocean. In the seconds before the pursuit had caught up with him he had made the rope fast to a stanchion. Now, as he dropped down, he swung inward toward the lower deck. Letting go of the rope, he fell heavily, but he was safe for the time.

From the engine room came the faint

jangle of bells and the beat of the propeller slowed as the *Truant* lost way. The searchlight up on the bridge cut through the night with dazzling brilliance as it played over the water which had been churned white in the wake of the ship.

For five minutes the *Truant* tarried while Glenn crouched in the shadows. Then the engine bells rang again, heavy, black smoke poured from the funnel, sparks drifted away aft and the *Truant* resumed its course.

Glenn was at a loss now to find a hiding place. He knew that for a time he was safe for the officers of the *Truant* believed he had gone overboard. The young scientist moved cautiously forward. As he neared the stairway which led to the upper deck, he heard men coming toward him, and he shrank back into the darkness.

MacRae, his shoulder now bandaged, was in the lead. Close behind him came Professor Pearson and Bob, hemmed in by burly members of the crew, all of whom were armed with wicked looking clubs.

"Take them down and lock them up," said

MacRae. "I'll be along shortly and give them something that will keep them quiet for a time."

MacRae turned and went back to the bridge, while Bob and the professor were marched down to the small room which was again to be their prison.

Glenn followed at a discreet distance, his plan of action still uncertain. From a point of vantage he watched the sailors shove his companions into the stuffy little room and close and lock the heavy steel door.

"Maybe one of us had better stay here and keep a watch on those fellows," said one of the sailors.

"Nothing doing," replied another. "I got a hunch what's going to happen to them won't be pleasant and I don't want to be around."

"Then we better get Mulligan out," said another. This met with their approval and they unlocked the door and dragged forth the guard Glenn had knocked out. They took him away with them and Glenn settled back to see what MacRae intended to do. He still had four cartridges left in the revolver and he

would use every one of them if necessary to protect his friends.

It was less than fifteen minutes later and Glenn had just shifted from one cramped position to another when he heard footsteps coming toward him. Glenn looked down at the gun to make sure that it was ready for fast action. Then he tensed himself for whatever might come.

The footsteps, firm and regular, came nearer. Then around the corner came the "man with the yellow face"!

Glenn stared with unbelieving eyes. Why the "man with the yellow face" was back in New York. But he couldn't be dreaming or seeing things, for those narrow eyes seemed to be boring straight into the nook in which he was hidden.

Glenn was tempted to leap out and face the mysterious stranger who was responsible for their misfortune. Then he took a firm grip on his nerves and waited. Other footsteps were coming and the radio operator hove into sight. He followed the first man at almost a specified interval, pausing while the other bent

down to unlock the door of the room which confined Bob and the professor.

The "man with the yellow face" stepped in first and the radio operator followed him. It was Glenn's chance for action. Running forward rapidly, he snapped the padlock on the door, locking the four men in the room. Then he turned and raced for the radio room. It was his big chance to flash out a call for help.

Chapter XII

A Call for Help

Glenn threw caution to the winds, pounding along the deck, gun in hand, eager and ready for combat with anyone who might seek to bar his path. Gone was all of the sleekness of the young scientist. In its place was primitive man, swinging both hands and looking for trouble.

There was no one on deck when he reached it, and he dove for the stairway. At the top he paused. A sailor was coming off the bridge. Glenn shrank back against the wall, but the man had seen him and came running. Apparently he was unarmed. Glenn slipped the gun into his pocket and met this attack with flying fists.

The sailor, as heavy as Glenn, asked no quarter and none was given. It was a silent, hard-fought battle, but Glenn was handy with

his fists and he packed a wallop like a stick of dynamite in his capable right hand.

But Glenn slipped. He was at the head of the stairs and his opponent was on him like a tiger. Fighting and clawing, they tumbled over and over as they rolled to the deck below.

Then Glenn got a break. He landed on top. With a short, sharp punch that started at his own waist and ended on the sailor's chin he ended the fight then and there.

Afraid that the commotion had attracted the attention of other sailors, Glenn raced to the upper deck. For once luck was with him and he ran to the radio room. The door was closed, but opened readily enough when he turned the knob. A dim light over the sending equipment cast an eerie glow over the room.

Glenn stepped inside and pushed the door shut after him. He found a switch at the left of the door and flooded the room with light. It was only for a moment while he locked the door. Then he snapped off the light and hurried across to the sending set.

The equipment was far more powerful than that carried on the usual cargo boat the

size of the *Truant* and Glenn, unaware of their distance from New York, felt sure he would be able to get the Radio Marine on his first call.

Slipping on the headset, he turned on the power and the tubes in the rack behind the table glowed. It was lighter now than Glenn wanted it and he took off the headset and hurried to the porthole. There he drew heavy cutains over it and went back to the desk. He turned off the night light over the set and in the glow from the power tubes prepared to flash out the message he hoped would bring rescue to them.

With a firm hand he pounded out the first signal. It was just a broadside, but it would have to do and he hoped that the everwatchful ears of Radio Marine would pick it up.

"To Robert Quentin, Dept. of Justice, Washington. Held aboard tramp ship *Truant*. Pearson, Ellis and Heath. All stations please relay."

Glenn repeated this, and was about to send it a third time when someone knocked sharply at the door.

"Open up, Sparks. The Old Man's got a message."

It was an unfamiliar voice and Glenn debated on what to do. If he opened the door, recognition would be sure and he might not be able to subdue this visitor. He decided it would be wiser to keep hammering away on the message. Someone surely would pick it up.

"Say, Sparks, open up. I've got a message."

Glenn kept at his task, pausing now to see if there were any answers. One came cracking back at him.

"*SS TRUANT.* Relaying your message. Can you give location?" It was signed by the Radio Marine. Glenn snapped an instant reply.

"Sorry. Unable to give location but ship headed for South America. Rush help."

The hammering on the door increased.

"I say, Sparks, I'm getting tired of fooling. Open this door or I'll report you to MacRae."

Glenn grinned. It would be some time before anyone reported him to MacRae, for he had the key to the padlock in his pocket and it would take a good bit of work with a cold

chisel and a sledge before MacRae and the radio operator were free again.

The hammering on the door ceased and Glenn heard the man moving around to one of the portholes. The knocking was resumed there. Finally the other lost his temper and in doing so stuck his hand through the glass.

There was an exclamation of pain as the glass tinkled to the floor.

"Now look what I've done," roared the other, in a voice that boded little good for "Sparks" when he was caught.

"Open that door or I'll turn the fire hose on you!"

But Glenn, still hunched over the key, only grinned. He knew that his message was through. They might turn the fire hose on him for all he cared. It would be only a matter of hours before Quentin located them and put an end to their enforced captivity.

The breeze parted the curtains at the broken window and Glen saw an evil-looking face peer in at him.

"Say, you're not Sparks. Where is he?" Then recognition dawned on the man.

"Help! Help!" he shouted. "Here's the fellow we thought had jumped overboard."

Glenn didn't relish all of the attention he was getting, so he slipped away from the glow of light around the radio set and made his way to the door. While the sailor was bawling lustily for aid, he slipped out the door and ran back along the deck to another companionway which led below. By the time reinforcements had gathered around the radio room, Glenn was far down in the ship, making his way toward the room where the professor, Bob, the radio operator and the "man with the yellow face" were confined.

There was no one on guard in front of the room and it was evident that Glenn's trick had not been discovered here. With gun again in hand, he unlocked the door, flung it open, and leaped to one side, waiting for the rush he felt sure would come.

Instead, only darkness and silence greeted him. A whiff of vapor drifted out of the room. It was sickeningly sweet and Glenn recognized it as gas.

For another moment he waited. Perhaps it

was a trick. Then a low groan came from the darkness. He recognized it as coming from Bob and throwing caution to the winds, he took a deep breath and plunged inside.

He stumbled over someone lying in front of the door. It was Bob and he reached down and dragged him away, pulling him out into the companionway where there was plenty of air.

Back into the room Glenn plunged, this time dragging out the professor. Someone had opened the porthole and the room was clearing now that there was a draft through it.

Glenn knew there were two more men in the room, the radio operator and the mysterious man with the yellow face, but his first concern was for the safety of Bob and the professor. He loosened their clothing and made sure their hearts were beating steadily. Bob's eyes flickered open and he smiled feebly.

"Gas," he murmured. "How's the professor?"

"He'll come around all right," said Glenn.

Glenn remembered the light switch this time and he turned on the electric light before entering the room the third time. The radio opera-

tor was sprawled against the wall under the porthole and it was evident that he had been the one who had opened it. Near him was another figure. At last he was to know the identity of the "man with the yellow face."

He turned the unconscious form over and stared into the face of MacRae. The "man with the yellow face" had vanished!

Chapter XIII

Through Walls of Steel

Glenn was too startled to believe his eyes and he looked around the room again. The blaze from the electric glow revealed every portion in its pitiless glare. There was no place that a man could hide and the porthole was far too small for anyone to squeeze through. Besides, it was a sheer drop from the port into the ocean.

Glenn bent down and dragged out the limp form of the radio operator and then he brought out MacRae. He was gasping for breath and involuntarily had gulped in a little of the gas which had not quite cleared from the room. His eyes smarted and his lungs burned from the acrid stuff, while the throbbing in his head commenced again.

He took deep breaths of the fresh air, for a clear head was essential. At any moment he might be discovered by some member of the

crew who was bound to come in search of MacRae and the radio operator.

Glenn went to work on Bob and the professor, massaging them and moving their arms and legs to get the circulation flowing freely. Bob was the first to respond and in several more minutes was able to get up.

"What happened?" he demanded huskily, looking down at the other three who were sprawled along the deck.

"Gas," replied Glenn tersely. "Help me with the professor."

Bob, his head still going in circles, knelt down and together they massaged the scientist back into consciousness. It was the second gassing the professor had undergone in a little more than twenty-four hours and his physical condition was such that he could not make the quick comeback of Bob.

"Take it easy," Glenn advised him, when he wanted to know what had happened. "I don't know exactly. We'll find out later. Right now I've got to decide what to do next."

MacRae was showing signs of consciousness, but the radio operator appeared deeply under

the effect of the gas. Whatever Glenn planned, must be done at once for with MacRae conscious and able to make an outcry their situation would be twice as dangerous.

But before Glenn could make up his mind on the next course of action, pounding feet came along the companionway and half a dozen sailors, led by Captain Otto, rushed at them.

Glenn balanced the gun in his hand for a second. There were four cartridges left. He knew that in the crowded corridor he could make every one of them count, but in the end he would be overpowered and the wounding of the seamen would be useless.

Turning quickly, he ran down the companionway, leaving Bob and the professor. They were still too groggy to make any resistance and running away from the oncoming sailors was out of the question as far as they were concerned. They stared after Glenn, who apparently was deserting them without a struggle, but Glenn had a very clear plan in mind now.

It was more than likely that the radio room

was deserted and this was his chance to flash out another message. That done he would willingly surrender and await the arrival of the rescue he was sure Robert Quentin would effect.

As Glenn had surmised the upper deck was deserted but he was careful to keep in the shadows so that any casual observer on the bridge, looking back, would not see him.

The door of the radio room was ajar and Glenn stepped inside. Strong arms reached out of the darkness and enfolded him in a smothering grasp. He was tempted to cry out, but that would only have brought new trouble on his head.

Lashing out with his feet, Glenn planted two telling kicks on the shins of his adversary and was rewarded for his efforts by a grunt of pain. For a moment those powerful arms relaxed their grip and Glenn slipped away.

Now free of the dangerous grasp, he dropped to the floor, crouching low, ready for the next attack.

There was only the faint glow from the transmitter tubes, which had been left on, to

light the room. Behind the door, Glenn could see the hulking mass of a man. The dim light accentuated the bulk of his opponent and made him look like a giant. Silently the man advanced toward the place where Glenn had dropped onto the floor.

Then a volcano of action erupted in the radio room. The sailor leaped toward Glenn. The young scientist twisted to one side and as his adversary rushed past, reversed the revolver and swung the butt of the heavy weapon as a club.

There was a resounding whack as the butt clipped the sailor on the left side of the head and a sharp groan of pain. But the blow had not been square and the sailor, maddened to white-hot fury by the pain, turned and made another rush toward Glenn.

It was going to be close, this battle in the semi-darkness with a man weighing at least forty pounds more than Glenn and skilled in every trick of rough and tumble fighting known to sailormen.

The sailor came in, flinging fists in every direction, and a hard left-handed blow took

Glenn alongside the nose. It was enough to knock him off balance and he dropped heavily to the floor, with the sailor following his advantage relentlessly.

But the fall gave Glenn a break. As he landed, he rolled to the right, still holding the gun butt as a club. In the last emergency, he was determined to reverse the gun and fire, but he waited for that until the very end.

With the gun as a club, he swung out viciously as the sailor came down beside him. It was fists against steel, and steel won. It wasn't a nice way to fight and Glenn knew it, but as far as he was concerned, there was nothing nice or pleasant about the *Truant* and the people on board.

With the sailor temporarily out of the fight, Glenn pulled himself to his feet. It was a real effort, for the battle in the radio room had taken a heavy toll from his strength and his head was throbbing painfully again.

He listened for a moment to see if the fight had attracted attention. Convinced that he was safe for at least a minute, he closed and bolted the door, hurried to the transmitter and

slipped on the headset. Fortunately the sending equipment had escaped injury and he got Radio Marine almost instantly. A reassuring message cracked back over the ether.

"Quentin has message. Says to hold on. Help coming fast."

That was what Glenn wanted to know and he shut off the transmitter.

Picking up a chair, he flung it against the tube rack. There was a crackle of electricity as wires shorted and the tubes exploded in a blast of flame that rocked the room.

With the transmitter definitely wrecked, Glenn opened the door and raced around to the other side of the cabin. The blasting of the tubes had attracted attention on the bridge and two men came running, but they failed to see Glenn slip into the darkness.

He found the lead wire from the transmitter to the antennae and with eager fingers ripped it down. There would be no further sending of messages to or from the *Truant*, but his purpose in tearing out the antennae lead was an entirely different one. Now he was ready to give in. His mission had been accomplished.

He tossed the gun over the rail and turned to go below.

On the lower deck Glenn came face to face with MacRae, white and shaken from his experience with the gas, but still angry enough to be vindictive.

Rough hands of sailors laid hold of Glenn and he was hustled below. Bob and the professor were sitting disconsolately along the wall of the tiny room in which they had been held captive and Glenn was shoved inside.

MacRae, his face lined with passion, came in and closed the door.

"Think you're pretty smart, don't you?" he snapped at Glenn.

"Not so very. It looks now like it would have been a good idea to have winged a few more of your henchmen."

MacRae's dark eyes blazed with anger and Glenn thought he was going to strike him, but the flare of passion cooled and MacRae smiled crookedly.

"Did you get your wireless message out?" he asked suavely.

"That's something you'll have to find out,"

said Glenn. "You'd better take a look at your radio room."

Alarm flashed across MacRae's face and he hurried out. Glenn could hear him leaving orders with the sailors outside to shoot if anyone tried to escape from the room.

"Fine fellow you were, leaving us in the lurch," said Bob, while Professor Pearson looked at Glenn questioningly.

"I didn't leave you," replied Glenn, in a voice so low it would be impossible for anyone outside to hear. "I wanted another chance at the radio room and I got it. Radio Marine put my message through to Quentin and the search is on. Then I smashed their transmitting apparatus and ran around outside and tore down the lead to the antennae. When MacRae sees the broken antennae lead he'll be fairly sure that my messages never got through."

"That's smart work, Glenn," said Professor Pearson. "I'll retract all of the suspicions your actions aroused in my mind."

"There's one thing I want to know," said Glenn. "I saw the 'man with the yellow face'

come in here. He was just ahead of the radio operator. I locked them in and when I dragged you out after being gassed there was only the operator and MacRae. The 'man with the yellow face' had vanished."

"You'll have to figure that one out alone," replied Bob. "I saw him come in. He had a gas gun in his hand. The radio man was right behind him. I made a jump for the gun and it went off and just then you slipped the lock on and we were all penned up here with the gas filling the room. I heard the glass of the porthole shatter, but there wasn't any draft to pull the gas out. It wasn't any time at all until we were all under."

Professor Pearson nodded his agreement.

"I'm wondering about the 'man with the yellow face.' It was a shock to see him stalk in here, but it is only logical that he should be aboard."

"But there's no expression to his face. It isn't lifelike," protested Glenn. "And answer this one: I saw him come in here and both of you saw him in the room, yet when I opened the door only you, the radio operator

and MacRae were here. Where did he go? The lock had not been tampered with and the porthole is too small for a man to squeeze through. That's a puzzle that will take a long time to solve."

"But in the solution of that we may find the key to this whole mystery," said the professor.

They were silent for a time, each pondering the mystery of the man who had vanished from the steel-walled room.

The radio operator and the "man with the yellow face" had gone into the room, yet the operator and MacRae had been dragged forth unconscious. Glenn wished that he had paid more attention to the suit the mystery man had worn.

There was a commotion outside the door of their room. The lock rattled and when the door swung open MacRae entered. The anger which had marked his face so deeply had disappeared and he smiled at them in a manner that was almost friendly.

"I ought to give you a sound thrashing for wrecking our radio room," he told Glenn,

"but you weren't as smart as you thought you were. Someone pulled down the lead to the antennae and your messages didn't go out on the air after all."

Glenn was prepared for this statement and he did a skillful bit of acting, registering extreme disappointment and dismay, much to the gratification of MacRae, who was now convinced that Glenn had failed to send out the alarm.

Chapter XIV

Rescue from the Air

MacRae appeared in better humor now, and he paused to talk with his prisoners, convinced that the voyage of the *Truant* would not be interrupted.

"I was going to be a little lenient with you," he told them, "and just about give you the run of the ship, but after the experience tonight you're going to stay here until we're at our destination. I'll have the ship's carpenter up in a few minutes to shackle you to your bunks."

"But that isn't necessary," protested the Professor. "I give you my word that no further effort at violence will be made by my companions."

"Seems like I heard something like that before," smiled MacRae darkly. "I'm taking no more chances."

With that he stepped outside and they heard

the lock snap. Then dimly came the sound of MacRae's retreating footsteps.

"Nice fellow," said Bob, whose head was still aching from the effects of the gas.

"Are you sure your message went through?" Professor Pearson asked Glenn.

"There's no question about it. Radio Marine gave me a confirmation. I couldn't give them our position. All the help I could supply was to tell them we were aboard the *Truant* and headed for South America."

"Quentin will lose no time in finding us. I rather imagine he'll be along before noon."

"You're pretty sure of his ability," said Bob.

"I have every reason to be. We've worked on several cases and he's the most persistent manhunter I've ever known. Usually I supply the scientific knowledge and Quentin turns it into practical use, which, after all, is a rather good combination."

"I'm all in," grunted Glenn. "I've been bruised and battered around until I'm just one big bruise with a sign 'don't touch' hung all over me. You two can talk the rest of the night if you want to. I'm going to sleep."

Glenn was just dropping into a deep slumber when the light came on and MacRae stepped into the room. Behind him came the ship's carpenter, an assortment of chains and leg irons in his hands.

"That's entirely unnecessary," protested Professor Pearson.

"Shut up and get into your bunk," said MacRae roughly. There was nothing to do but obey, and the carpenter set about his task.

Glenn was the first to feel the humiliation of being placed in chains, his right leg being fastened to the steep post of the bunk. Bob, protesting strongly but futilely, was next, and the professor was finally chained to his bunk.

"I guess there'll be no more travelling around this ship for you," said MacRae, surveying the work of the carpenter with care. "Well, here's hoping you like being in the chain gang."

He stepped outside with a bitter laugh trailing on his lips. The light went out and the door was slammed shut.

Glenn lay back in his bunk and drew the one blanket up around his shoulders. Below

he could hear Bob rattling his chain in anger. The professor calmly resigned himself to his fate and was the first to drop asleep.

Glenn soon followed, but Bob remained awake for another hour, his head throbbing from the effects of the gas. Like Glenn, he was wrestling with the problem of the "man with the yellow face."

How could he have escaped from the room?

How had MacRae entered?

Puzzle as he might, Bob admitted that the problem was beyond his comprehension. Finally sleep lulled his over-wrought nerves and it was dawn before anyone in the tiny room awoke.

Breakfast was brought in by a sullen-faced sailor. There was coffee and a thick cereal. The professor complained about the food, for he was used to toast and jam and tea for his morning meal. He also missed his morning paper, and Glenn smiled faintly at the discomfort of the scientist. To Professor Pearson, his deprivation was very real, more important at the moment than their own troubles.

He even asked the sailor when he came to

take away their dishes about a paper and a few minutes later the seaman returned with a copy of the *New York Times*.

"Compliments of Mr. MacRae," he said.

Professor Pearson seized the paper eagerly, and Glenn looked down to see the date of issue. It had been printed four days before. That indicated they couldn't be far down the coast for undoubtedly the *Truant* had been in New York when the paper was brought aboard. Then MacRae had said they had been taken in a speed boat down the harbor and placed aboard the *Truant* after it put to sea. That meant they were not much more than two days out of New York harbor and at the slow speed of the tramp ship, were probably well off the Carolinas.

Professor Pearson divided the *Times*, and they all took turns at reading that conservative news sheet. When he had finished, Glenn slid over the edge of his bunk in an effort to reach the floor, but the leg chain was a little too short. Had he let go of the bunk with his hands he would have been tripped up short.

Bob and the professor were a little more

fortunate. Their chains were as long as the one on Glenn's leg, but being in the lower bunks they could stand up and walk a step or two. Bob could even get to the porthole and look out.

"Not a sign of smoke on the horizon," he reported, after a careful search of the sea.

The hours dragged on and the *Truant* rolled steadily southward, her old engines pounding.

Noon came and another portion of food. Their meal was more varied this time and even Professor Pearson found no cause to complain. The sea air had whetted their appetites, and when they were through the trays were cleaned of food.

Bob kept a sharp lookout at the porthole, but early afternoon slipped by without a sign of rescue. It was three o'clock before he sighted a small black dot in the western sky.

"There's something out there, way down on the horizon. It may be a plane, or maybe I'm just imagining things."

"Watch closely," cautioned the professor. "It's likely that Quentin will come in a navy seaplane."

Glenn rolled over in his bunk and leaned far out. He could see over Bob's shoulder, but it was a precarious position. A sudden pitch or roll of the *Truant* might hurl him out of the bunk.

"It's a plane!" cried Bob. "I can see it plainly now. It's coming our way and two more are following."

"Then it's Quentin. I knew he wouldn't fail us," said Professor Pearson, attempting to get close enought to the porthole to watch the impending drama.

Above the pounding of the engine, they heard the high-pitched drone of airplane motors.

The planes were flying in formation now and Glenn could see them clearly. They were big flying boats, swooping down toward the *Truant*.

From the bowels of the tramp steamer the jangle of the engine room bell could be heard and the old engine pounded harder than ever. The *Truant* was trying a futile race against the swift, avenging planes.

"Here they come!" cried Bob as the drone

of the planes blurred out every other sound.

From up on deck came a sharp series of explosions.

"What's that?" cried the professor.

"Sounded like a machine gun," replied Glenn. "If the crew is trying to resist those navy planes, they're going to be in for a bitter lesson."

The firing sounded again as the planes swept back over the *Truant* and this time there was a deeper series of detonations.

"Evidently this isn't a one-sided shin-dig," grinned Glenn. "Unless I'm wrong, about four machine guns were in on that chorus, which means one from the *Truant* and three from the planes. This won't last long."

The planes swung around in the west and headed back toward the *Truant*. From one of them a dark missile hurtled downward. It struck the water a good hundred yards away from the ship, and a geyser of spray shot skyward as a thundering shock rent the air.

On the echoes of the explosion, the engine slowed and the *Truant* gradually lost way.

"I guess that convinced Captain Otto that

he was fooling with the wrong outfit," said Bob. "The planes are landing now and taxiing in toward the ship."

"It won't be long now," added Glenn. "Well, I can't say that I'll be mad when this leg iron is removed."

While two of the flying points remained a hundred yards away from the *Truant*, their machine guns trained on the dingy ship, the third one came alongside and two men in flying clothes scrambled up the ladder which was thrown down from the *Truant*.

Suddenly the door of the prison room was thrown open and the professor, Bob and Glenn turned to stare into the strange countenance of the "man with the yellow face."

The sight rooted them to the floor. There was that absolutely expressionless face, the narrow eyes, the upward curving lips. Not a muscle moved, but vindictive eyes, glowing with hate, burned at them.

Then Glenn saw the gun. It was being raised with deadly precision. This time it was not a gas gun, but a heavy automatic, capable of carrying death with every shot.

Still there was no change of expression on the part of the man at the door. He simply stood there, his eyes moving slightly as he glanced from one to the other. Bob, the nearest to the door, made a lunge forward but his chain tripped him and he fell heavily.

Methodically the gun followed Bob and Glenn saw the finger tightening on the trigger. His own throat burned with agony at the helplessness of the situation.

From the companionway there came a slight sound. The "man with the yellow face" swung around and then leaped out of the room. A gun cracked, but it was not the weapon in the hands of the man of mystery. His gun clattered to the floor and with a scream of pain he fled down the hall. At least he was human, as the scream revealed.

Robert Quentin burst through the doorway, while the flyer who had accompanied him aboard raced after the fleeing gunman.

"Never mind us," cried the professor. "Get the 'man with the yellow face.' He's the key to the mystery."

Quentin turned and ran after the others.

The pounding footsteps gradually died away. From the deck came another shot and then a long silence. It was five minutes before Quentin hurried back to them, his face strained and white.

"What happened?" demanded the professor, who had been pacing the room as far as his chain would permit.

"We wounded him in the shoulder," replied Quentin, "and he went over the side."

The professor stared at him with widening eyes. All of his hopes for the solution of the mystery of their abduction and the disappearance of the ships had been pinned on the apprehension of the man with the yellow face. Now they were wiped away. He must start all over again.

"He never came up," said Quentin softly, "but there is no mistake. I saw his face just before he jumped. It was 'the man with the yellow face.' "

"Well, let's get these leg irons off and start for New York at once," said the professor.

Quentin summoned the ship's carpenter, and the shackles were soon removed.

"Who's the key man here?" he demanded.

"A chap named MacRae," explained Glenn. "He seemed to be in charge. We had only seen the 'man with the yellow face' once since we came aboard until just before your fortunate arrival on the scene. Get MacRae. He may be able to give us some information."

With Quentin in the lead, they went directly to the bridge where Captain Otto sullenly awaited their arrival.

"Where's MacRae?" snapped the federal agent.

Captain Otto pointed overboard.

"You saw him go," he said.

"But that was the 'man with the yellow face!" protested Glenn.

"It was also MacRae," said the captain. He drew a hand over his eyes as though in horror. "Once or twice I saw him like that. It was enough. I am glad that he has gone. He was inhuman."

"The radio man ought to know something about MacRae," said Bob. "He was with him when he came into our room last night and gassed us."

They hastened back to the radio room, but it was empty and from the rear came the sturdy voice of a sailor crying, "Man overboard."

They answered the call on the run.

"Who is it?" demanded Quentin.

"Sparks," replied the sailor. "He just came running along and went right over the rail without stopping."

Professor Pearson shuddered.

"One thing about this gang, they make sure none of their secrets will fall into the hands of investigators. I think the rest of the men aboard are innocent of any real part in the conspiracy, including Captain Otto. My impression is that the vessel was chartered without the owners actually knowing for what purpose it was to be used."

"I'll order Captain Otto to put back to Norfolk," said Quentin. "It may turn out that we will need his testimony and I'm not going to take any chances."

While Quentin went to the bridge to order the *Truant* turned back on its course, the others went to MacRae's cabin. A thorough search failed to reveal anything that would help them.

There were a few articles of wearing apparel, but no papers of importance.

At Quentin's order, a boat was launched, for the naval planes were now standing off several hundred yards from the *Truant*.

With the professor in the lead and Glenn last, they scrambled down the ladder and stepped into the boat to be rowed smartly alongside the planes. The professor and Quentin boarded the first plane, while Glenn and Bob clambered into the cabin of the second along with the officer who had accompanied Quentin aboard the *Truant*.

The sun was well down in the west when the motors of the planes awoke with deafening roars. Smoke was pouring from the dingy funnel of the *Truant* as the old tramp ship regained headway, turning in a half circle and bearing away on a north, northwest course for Norfolk.

The planes, sending white streamers of spray out behind them, shot over the water, lifted cleanly from the surface of the ocean, and at one hundred and twenty miles an hour headed back on the long flight to New York City.

Chapter XV

Midnight Conference

The hour was near midnight when they gathered around a conference table in Professor Pearson's laboratory atop the Leitsweiler building. The famous scientist sat at the head. To his right was Robert Quentin and next to him sat Gifford Crain, vice president of the Great Northern Transportation Company. On the other side of the table were Bob and Glenn.

The trip back in the navy seaplanes had been uneventful, but night had fallen long before the lights of New York City became visible. This was their first real opportunity to sit down and recount in detail the hazardous events of the preceding forty-eight hours.

"Let's start from the first," said Quentin. "Tell me the whole story and we'll see what we can add up when we're through."

"There is little for me to tell," said Professor Pearson. "I was working here at my desk when suddenly I became groggy. The next thing I knew was when I awoke aboard the *Truant*. Glenn and Bob were with me and Glenn was able to supply the most information."

Quentin turned toward Glenn.

"Let's hear your side of it."

Glenn told in detail how the "man with the yellow face" had tried to run them down with the taxi at the entrance of the alley, how Bob had been overcome when he entered the room, and how he finally had been gassed and abducted.

"You'll never really know how close I was to the man of mystery," said Quentin. "I was afraid something like that might happen and went on personal guard in the alley. But he eluded me in the fog and crept up the ladder. A piece of mortar from the parapet, falling into the alley, gave me the clue that I had been tricked, and I hastened up the fire escape after him. He was dragging you out when I arrived, but I was a second too late. I fired sev-

eral times but he had the elevator door closed and was on the way down."

They turned and looked in the direction Quentin pointed. Two bullet marks were plainly visible on one of the elevator doors.

"By the time I could get down to the street, he had vanished, taking you with him," said Quentin. "Every train, plane and highway was watched, so it was logical for him to turn to the sea. We combed every outgoing vessel, but his trick of taking you out to sea in a speed boat and putting you aboard the *Truant*, which had sailed some time before, threw us off."

"It was through Glenn's cool work that we finally got a message through," said Professor Pearson. "He contacted Radio Marine and got a confirmation. Then he smashed the transmitting equipment and also pulled down the lead to the antennae. That convinced MacRae that Glenn had been unable to get a message out and he had no inkling that rescue was on its way until you swooped down on him in the navy planes."

"Do you suppose the chap you called Mac-

Rae could be the head of this ring?" asked Crain, who had been listening intently.

"No." Professor Pearson was quite definite about that. "MacRae indicated that he was merely one of the cogs in the machine, but he must have been a mighty important one to have jumped overboard."

"What about the radio operator?" asked Quentin.

"I'm not sure just what part he played. He was mixed up in it some way or he wouldn't have jumped overboard."

"The thing that bothers me is the 'yellow face' business," said Glenn. "We know now that MacRae was the man. At times he had the yellow face, yet again he appeared perfectly normal. He didn't seem like the type who would put on a lot of makeup as a mask. If that had been needed he could have used a cloth covering of some kind for his face."

"You're right there," agreed Quentin. "There's something about his 'yellow face' that we don't know. Perhaps we never will now."

"It's all very well to talk about what has

happened," said Crain. "What I want to know is what we are going to do to protect the *Atlantica* when she makes her maiden voyage?"

"There's more than three weeks before that," countered Quentin. "Give us time. Why, we haven't been able to find the *Oracle* or the *Red Wing*. But seriously, the navy is throwing a cordon of destroyers clear across the Atlantic. Uncle Sam is more than a little angry at having two vessels looted of more than five million dollars of his personal gold. The destroyers will be stationed every 400 miles, which should place them within striking distance of anything that happens."

"What we really need out there are several airplane carriers," grumbled the shipping executive.

"Granted, but the carriers are all in the Pacific where the main strength of the navy is concentrated. We'll have to do the best we can."

Professor Pearson had been silent during this discussion, but now he brought forth a plan he had been considering.

"When does your next liner sail for England?" he asked Crain.

"The *Houston*, a cabin boat, leaves at noon. Why?"

"If you can arrange space, I'll go to England at once. My assistants will go with me and we'll set up a complete laboratory aboard the *Houston*. It might be well to tip some newspaper friend that a substantial shipment of bullion will be aboard."

"And have the *Houston* disappear? Well, I should say not."

"I think Professor Pearson's suggestion an excellent one," put in the federal agent. "He can cross to England and return before the maiden trip of the *Atlantica*. Something that will help us solve the disappearance of these other ships may come up on his voyage."

"But don't you think it a needless risk to inform the newspaper men that gold will be aboard the *Houston?*" said Mr. Crain.

"It's a simple case of putting bait in the trap," Quentin reassured him.

The shipping magnate appeared convinced

of the urgency of the situation and telephoned at once for the necessary reservations.

"I'll take care of the passports and other details," said Quentin. "Can you make it by noon?"

"We'll snatch several hours sleep and then start packing the materials we'll want to take with us," said Professor Pearson.

Bob and Glenn had little to say, but they were tremendously excited at the prospect of the trip to Europe and the chance that they would come to grips with the mysterious foe of the Great Northern Transportation Company.

There were extra cots at the laboratory and as soon as their visitors departed, they unrolled blankets and spread them on the cots.

"We must be up at four o'clock," Professor Pearson cautioned them. "I'll set the alarm clock. Keep an ear tuned for it. You know I'm too sound a sleeper to wake up readily."

Bob was soon asleep, but Glenn tossed for an hour before sleep finally closed his tired eyes. The mystery of the yellow mask Mac-

Rae had worn kept puzzling him for he felt that in the solution of that they might hold the real key to the disappearance of the ships.

It seemed only a few minutes later when the strident call of the alarm clock sounded through the laboratory. Glenn was awake instantly and Bob was not far behind him in pulling on his clothes. Professor Pearson was in a heavy slumber on his favorite couch and the young scientists had to shake him roughly to awaken him.

They telephoned out for a tray of breakfast to be sent up and then, under the rapid orders of the professor, set about packing the equipment he desired to take with them. Test tubes, alcohol lamps, bottles of precious chemicals, supplies of glass tubing that could be heated and shaped, retorts and last of all, half a dozen gas masks of various kinds were packed away in boxes.

"Why the masks?" asked Bob.

"After our experience with MacRae, I'm taking no chances," replied the professor.

It was well after ten o'clock when the last of the packing was completed, and a transfer

truck was summoned with the professor giving special instructions for the handling of his chemicals and equipment.

They arrived at the *Houston's* pier half an hour before departure time and were shown immediately to a suite of rooms on the A deck. It was, in fact, two large suites which had been thrown together, one set of rooms having been stripped of furniture. These were to serve as the laboratory, while the others were to be used as living quarters for the professor and his two assistants.

Quentin came aboard just before sailing time, but Mr. Crain had been detained.

The federal agent pulled a copy of one of the early afternoon editions from his pocket. On the page with the ship news was a paragraph to the effect that additional insurance had been taken out on the *Houston*, since the ship was carrying a valuable consignment of gold.

"Splendid, splendid," said the professor, patting Quentin on the shoulder. "I hope our game rises to the bait."

"I'll be greatly disappointed if it doesn't,"

replied Quentin. "Good luck, professor. I'll see you in a little over two weeks."

"I understand the *Houston* is scheduled for a fast trip, with only two days in port at Southampton," replied the scientist. "Seven days over and seven days back with two days in port. That means sixteen days away. Much can happen and I hope that much will. Be sure the destroyers are on the alert for any distress calls."

"Special messages have already gone out, cautioning them to keep a close watch on the progress of the *Houston*," Quentin reassured him. "Good-bye professor. Good-bye, boys."

They answered his farewell in a chorus and he hurried down the gangplank just before it was drawn upward. The siren of the *Houston* hooted a farewell and the tugs swung the ship away from the pier and out into the river.

For a time they stood at the rail, watching the skyline of the metropolis. Then the professor summoned them to the cabin. Unpacking would be a job and they must be at the task at once for once away from shore, anything might happen on this voyage.

Chapter XVI

A Cry in the Night

The rest of the first day aboard the *Houston* was spent in unpacking their scientific paraphernalia. Instead of dressing for dinner and joining the other passengers, they had a lunch sent up to their cabin in order that they might lose no time in their work.

Glenn had brought along a special box of equipment and after all of the rest had been unpacked, he turned his attention to this. Professor Pearson was engrossed at a makeshift laboratory table and Bob, thoroughly tired out, lounged nearby in an easy chair.

"If you'll tell me what's inside, I'll give you a hand," he told Glenn.

"Never mind. I can make it all right. It's just some junk I picked up and jammed in here before we left the lab."

But Bob's curiosity was aroused and he

helped Glenn pry off the heavy lid of the big packing case. Inside was revealed a compact short wave radiophone with an auxiliary for wireless telegraphy.

"What's the idea of bringing that along?" asked Bob.

"Just a little precaution of my own," explained Glenn. "It isn't especially difficult for someone to put the equipment of a liner out of commission and if that should happen on our trip, I'm going to be in a position to communicate with other stations at once."

"You're right," agreed Bob. "We may need this thing before the voyage is over, especially since the New York papers have carried stories that bullion is being taken to Europe aboard this ship."

They installed the radiophone in their own stateroom. It was a simple set, yet powerful, operating directly from a light plug in the stateroom with a transformer to step up the current to the necessary voltage.

"I'll explain to the captain that I've installed a set," said Glenn. "It may knock all of the fuses if we put too heavy a load on the system."

Later that night Glenn went alone and found Captain Reedy on the bridge. The captain had been informed by Mr. Crain of the mission of Professor Pearson and his young assistants and was anxious to cooperate in every way.

At Glenn's suggestion, the purser produced the passenger list and the captain scanned it with him.

"Anyone appear suspicious?" asked Glenn.

"Not so far," replied the purser. "There's a good many familiar faces aboard, although of course there are the usual number of first trippers. I'd say it was an unusually nice looking crowd. Looking for trouble?"

"Well hardly," replied Glenn, "but you never can tell."

The purser was instructed to inform Glenn of any unusual actions on the part of any of the passengers and the chief radio operator was given similar instructions about the transmission of messages. In this way a practical censorship was established on every communication sent to or from the *Houston*.

It was nearly midnight when Glenn finally

returned to the cabin. All of their scientific equipment was in place and Professor Pearson had retired to his own room, thoroughly worn out by the exciting events of the foregoing hours. Glenn looked into his room for a second. The professor was sleeping so soundly that he failed to hear the door open.

Glenn shook his head. He didn't like that. Anyone could come in and surprise the Professor, but to lock the door on the outside was unwise if any accident should occur during the night.

Yet he hesitated to wake the scientist and have him get up and lock the door from the inside. Finally Glenn quietly closed the door and went to their own room. Bob was asleep, snoring dismally, and Glenn shook him into wakefulness.

"I'm going to try our own short wave set," he told his sleepy-eyed companion. "The captain and the chief operator have ordered extra heavy fuses installed on this circuit and we'll see what happens."

Glenn sat down at the table on which the compact set had been placed. Slipping on the

headset, he snapped on the switch, his narrowed eyes watching for the lights in the cabin to flicker.

They wavered for an instant at the heavy drain of current, but they came back to their normal brilliancy. Glenn cut the set in on the portable aerial they had installed and tuned for a New York station, the letters for which had been given him by Robert Quentin.

By previous arrangement, Glenn had agreed to contact Quentin each night for a private talk and the station he was calling was a police radio, used only for secret or emergency purposes.

In less than a minute, he heard Quentin's voice in his ear phones. Then the words came through more clearly as he tuned the set.

"Anything suspicious happened?" asked the Department of Justice agent.

"Nothing so far," Glenn reassured him. "I've checked the passenger list and the purser and chief radio operator have been informed to keep a close watch. There's little more that can be done. We've got the lab all set up and are ready for the first break that comes along."

"There's little news here, except that I'm confident the North Europa Company is behind the plot to discredit the Great Northern people. My agents in Europe have learned the North Europa is so heavily involved on their last large liners that success for the *Atlantica* will mean their financial ruin."

"But the North Europa is considered one of the crack North Atlantic lines," said Glenn.

"Which is one reason it may be almost impossible to pin suspicion on them. Their general manager, Hans Kraus, has been missing from his office for more than a month and I have a hunch that he is personally directing this sabotage in the mid-Atlantic. We're checking every angle and I'll let you know the minute anything develops. Contact me tomorrow at midnight. I'll be here."

They signed off and Glenn turned to an astonished Bob.

"Why didn't you tell me about all of these arrangements to keep in touch with Quentin?" he asked.

"Several reasons," said Glenn, throwing his weary body down on the bed. "For one thing

there wasn't time. Secondly, in telling you, Professor Pearson might have overheard and Quentin doesn't want to alarm him too much. The professor isn't as young as he was once."

"Then Quentin thinks we may be up against a tough proposition this trip?" asked Bob.

"Just about the toughest we've ever faced," admitted Glenn soberly. "I stopped to look in on the professor when I came through. He's sleeping very heavily and his door isn't locked. I don't like that."

"Neither do I," admitted Bob. "Tell you what. I'll jerk the blankets off my bed and make up a place to sleep in front of his door. That should effectually stop anyone from getting into his room."

"Sounds all right, but it won't work," said the practical Glenn. "When you get to sleep, you snore and your snore would give you away. Better let me do the guard duty. I sleep quietly and lightly. If anyone drops a pin in that room, I'll hear it."

"I guess you're right," conceded Bob, who was notoriously a heavy and loud sleeper.

Glenn pulled the bedding from his berth

and with Bob giving him a hand, even took the mattress along. In this manner he fashioned a comfortable bed in front of the only door to Professor Pearson's stateroom.

The gloom in the room they had turned into a laboratory was so deep that a marauder would step on Glenn before seeing him, unless the visitor carried a flashlight in his hands.

Bob returned to the other bedroom and Glenn undressed, slipped into his pajamas, and pulled up the covers.

The *Houston* was pounding along, cutting through the moderate swell with little motion. Earlier in the night there had been a thin moon, but this was gone and the only light which entered the stateroom filtered in through a porthole, which was only semi-curtained. It came from a night light down the passageway.

Glenn's tense nerves were slow in relaxing and he twisted and turned on his bed, which in spite of the mattress was none too comfortable. Through his mind raced the whole stream of events which had taken place since that first eventful night in the laboratory when

the "man with the yellow face" had made his first appearance.

Quentin's information, pointing the finger of suspicion toward the North Europa Company and the disappearance of the general manager of that great shipping line was not conducive to a quiet mind. Vaguely the name Hans Kraus brought a train of memories back to Glenn, but he couldn't quite recall just how it fitted in. Perhaps later, when he wasn't so tired, his mind would function better.

Finally he dropped into a light and fitful sleep, dozing for a while and then waking with a start. On these occasions he held himself tense, listening for some sound from the professor's room, only to drop back on the mattress, reassured that all was well beyond the door he was guarding. Each time Glenn fingered a small but deadly gun he had placed within easy grasp.

It was two o'clock when Bob came padding in to see if Glenn didn't want to change places. "I'm afraid you'd sleep too soundly," Glenn said, rejecting the offer, and Bob, a little grateful, didn't insist. Within a short time regular

snores drifted out of the door of the room in which Bob was sleeping.

Glenn listened for a time and then dropped into another light sleep. How long he had slept he couldn't tell, but when he awoke a cold fright seized him. Someone was in the lab, advancing stealthily toward the door, coming nearer to him with every tread of softly placed feet.

Glenn's muscles froze for the moment. Then he realized that his own presence in the room was undetected. His right hand grasped the gun and he slipped off the safety catch. There was only the tiniest click, yet it was enough to stop the cautious advance of the marauder.

With bated breath, Glenn waited for the next move. The door to the passageway was half ajar, showing how access had been gained. Glenn knew it had been locked, but in the light from the passageway a key could be seen on the outside of the lock.

Then the stealthy advance was resumed and Glenn steeled himself for the shock of combat.

Between Glenn and the unknown visitor,

there was one patch of light where a glow trickled in through the porthole. Glenn kept his eyes fixed on this area, for from the cautious movements of the unknown, he was advancing in a direction which would bring him into this light area. It might be only for a second, yet Glenn felt it would be sufficient.

Then it happened. The face appeared in the light and Glenn's finger chilled on the trigger of the revolver. He couldn't pull it, he couldn't move, he couldn't even scream for the "man with the yellow face" was looking in his direction.

Chapter XVII

The Flattened Bullet

The shock of seeing that never-to-be-forgotten face paralyzed Glenn. His nerves felt dead and the blood chilled in his veins. He wanted to cry out, but words congealed in his throat.

Then the face faded out of the glow of light and the man came closer to Glenn, his feet moving softly over the floor of the stateroom.

The slight sound broke the spell which had held Glenn fast for he knew that his new "man with the yellow face" was entirely human and he poised himself for the shock of combat.

The advantage was all Glenn's. Hidden in the deep shadows of the doorway to Professor Pearson's room, he was only a shapeless blot in the darkness. He gripped the gun more firmly, turning it so that it could be used as a club, an especially effective weapon.

Glenn wished for a flashlight, but the nearest one was on a table on the other side of the room. There wasn't even a light switch within reach and he forced himself to wait patiently.

The time seemed an hour. Actually it was less than a minute until a figure loomed before Glenn. The young scientist's right arm swung in a choppy arc, carrying tremendous force.

There was a dull thud as the butt of the gun struck the other man's head and Glenn heard a muffled cry of pain. His first blow, hard though it was, had not been sufficient to knock the unknown marauder unconscious and Glenn saw the invader staggering back toward the door.

From the doorway came a spit of flame and the echoing reverberations of a pistol shot. A bullet plunked into the wall behind Glenn.

So that was the way it was going to be. Glenn, smiling grimly in the dark, reversed the gun and fired quickly. It was a point-blank shot for the other man was now clearly outlined in the doorway.

Again the rooms echoed to a shot as Glenn fired, but his bullet seemed to have little ef-

fect for the unknown slipped out of the door.

Glenn started in full pursuit, but brought up shortly, gasping for breath, his eyes smarting and his throat aching.

Bob, aroused by the gunfire, snapped on the lights of their makeshift laboratory and Professor Pearson, attired in an old-fashioned full-length nightshirt, also appeared on the scene, half stumbling over the roll of bedding Glenn had placed in front of his door.

"What's going on?" demanded Bob.

"I'm not sure, yet," said Glenn, shaking his head in misery. "I awoke a few minutes ago and realized someone was in the room and coming toward Professor Pearson's door."

The scientist looked at the bedding on the floor.

"Were you sleeping there?" he asked Glenn.

His assistant nodded.

"Why?" Professor Pearson wanted to know.

"I was afraid something like this might happen. You hadn't locked your door and you were sleeping very heavily."

"Go on," urged Bob.

"I knew it was pitch dark just in front of the doorway," said Glenn, "so I waited. There was a faint glow of light from the porthole and I figured this fellow would pass through that. He did and that's where I got my surprise."

"What?" demanded the breathless Bob.

"He was 'the man with the yellow face'!"

"Impossible!" gasped Bob and the professor together.

Before Glenn could explain, the steward on duty on their deck arrived and passengers, alarmed by the shooting, hastened to the room. Behind them came Captain Reedy, who had thrown a dressing gown over his pajamas. He elbowed his way through the throng outside the door and faced the professor.

"What happened?" His words were so low those outside listened in vain.

"A marauder who was scared away by one of my assistants," explained the professor. "Tell them a chemical I had left in several of my retorts exploded with sounds like pistol shots. There's no reason to alarm them."

Captain Reedy welcomed the suggestion. Leaving the room, he spoke briefly but firmly to the passengers gathered in the passageway.

"I only hope those crazy scientists won't blow up the ship," Glenn heard one passenger grumble, as the crowd dispersed, apparently satisfied with the explanation offered by Captain Reedy.

When the captain returned, they closed the door and sat down in the professor's bedroom after making sure that the portholes were fast and no one could overhear their conversation.

Glenn briefly and tersely recounted what had transpired from the time he had awakened until the shots had aroused everyone on A deck.

"You're sure it was a man with a yellow face?" queried the professor.

"There's no doubt about it," insisted Glenn. "I can't forget it. It's far too vivid and appalling, especially when we thought all of that was over with when MacRae disappeared from the *Truant*."

Captain Reedy lifted inquiring eyebrows,

and Professor Pearson told him of the mystery of the "man with the yellow face."

"I'll have a thorough search made of the ship the first thing in the morning," promised the ship's officer.

"That will do little good," said Professor Pearson. "This chap is far too clever to be caught with any incriminating evidence."

"There's another thing that's bothering me," put in Glenn. "I started after him when I ran into what was almost an invisible wall of something. My eyes smarted and my throat started to burn. They're still raw. It must have been something that was discharged with his gun."

"How did you happen to miss him at that short range?" asked Bob, for Glenn was an excellent shot with a revolver.

"I don't know. I thought I had him sure."

Bob's eyes scanned the floor near the door and he suddenly bent down and picked up a small object.

"This looks like a bullet," he exclaimed.

They all gathered around him, looking at the misshaped leaden pellet in his hands.

"That's the one I fired at him," said Glenn, taking the missile from Bob's fingers. Glenn scanned the wall and door to see if there was any mark from the bullet, but none was visible.

"Looks like I hit him all right," said Glenn, "but he must have been wearing a bullet-proof vest. That's the only explanation I can give."

"If that's true, we'll certainly find the vest when we search the ship," said Captain Reedy hopefully.

"Afraid not," countered Glenn. "It would be too easy to find and for that reason the fellow who wore it will chuck it overboard during the night. It's probably on its way to the bottom of the North Atlantic right now."

"What can we do?" asked the captain.

"Nothing," advised Professor Pearson. "This is only one of a minor series of events which in the end will lead to the great climax. We must be ready for that and in the meantime keep our eyes and ears tuned for anything we can detect. Now I suggest that we all go back to bed and get as much sleep as possible during the remainder of the night."

This was agreed to only after Captain Reedy

had insisted on posting a watch of two sailors outside their doors.

Professor Pearson, in slippers and long night shirt, padded toward his bed while Bob gave Glenn a hand in picking up the bedding for with the guard on duty there was no need for Glenn to maintain his vigil.

It was well after three in the morning when sleep descended and their tense nerves relaxed.

Chapter XVIII

Unexpected News

The next morning a thorough search of the *Houston* was made at the insistence of Captain Reedy. It was during this search that Glenn and Bob came to know Loren Helsell, first officer of the cabin liner.

Loren was almost thirty, with gray eyes that could turn steely in a flash. He was just under six feet tall, with powerful shoulders and large, capable hands. Intensely interested in his own work, he was broad enough to find time to keep abreast of scientific developments and was familiar with some of the outstanding work of Professor Pearson. Thus the meeting of Loren with the young scientists was opportune for both, as this was to prove later.

The search of the ship, lasting through the morning hours, proved fruitless. No bullet-proof vest could be found and neither could

they discover any trace of the man with the yellow face. Only a few passengers objected to the search of their rooms, and even these appeared above suspicion.

It was after noon when they gathered in the suites on A deck which had been assigned to Professor Pearson and his helpers. Captain Reedy was frankly perplexed and worried. Loren looked on quietly, drinking in every word.

"There is little we can do," concluded Professor Pearson as he reviewed the activities of the day, "except to keep doubly alert."

"I'll see that special guards are kept in this passageway all of the time," promised Captain Reedy.

"Don't do that," advised the professor. "Then there would be no chance for us to catch the man we're after. This afternoon we'll rig photo-electric rays at the doors so that whenever anyone crosses the beam an alarm will be given. This will prove effective and won't scare away our prey."

Captain Reedy agreed with the professor and Glenn and Bob set to work at once rigging

up the invisible burglar alarm. There were plenty of materials in the boxes they had brought along, but even then it was late afternoon before the protective circuit was complete. They worked it out ingeniously for an alarm bell would not have been satisfactory so a tiny light was placed at the head of the bed where Glenn was to sleep. When the circuit was broken this light would flash on. The circuit was also hooked in with a bell on the bridge so the alarm would be given in two places.

When they retired that night, they were completely protected by the invisible photo-electric rays.

Glenn slept fitfully for the first two hours, awakening almost on the dot of midnight, the hour when he again called Quentin over the short-wave radiophone. The Department of Justice agent was waiting for the message to come through, and as soon as Glenn adjusted the volume, anxiously inquired for their safety.

Glenn told him in detail of the attack the night before and how the unknown assailant had fled.

"Are you sure about the face?" Quentin

appeared greatly disturbed on this point for he had seen MacRae go over the rail of the *Truant*.

"There's no question about it," replied Glenn. "I had only a fleeting glimpse of him, but I'm sure he was a larger man than MacRae."

"Which only adds more question marks in our problem," replied Quentin.

Glenn lowered his voice when he told the federal agent of the protective measures they had taken.

"Splendid plan," Quentin assured him. "Now see that it's on every night."

"After the scare of last night, you needn't worry," Glenn promised. "What about Hans Kraus and the North Europa Company?"

"We haven't been able to learn another thing about Kraus," said Quentin.

"There's one thing I wish you would do. Try and ascertain if any small dirigibles have been reported missing lately or whether any such crafts have been constructed for some little known company."

"You thinking of buying one?" chided Quentin.

"I might."

"Seriously, do you believe a dirigible may enter into this mystery?"

"I don't know," replied Glenn honestly. "From the way it looks now, almost anything can and does happen. But I want that information."

"You'll get it," promised Quentin. "I'll do my best to have it for you by tomorrow night. Think your set will have enough power for us to maintain these contacts all the way across?"

"Ample unless we run into some unusual static conditions. I'm signing off now until tomorrow night."

Quentin's cheery goodnight came to him across the waters and Glenn snapped off the transmitter and went to bed. Bob, sleeping heavily, had not even been disturbed by the conversation.

For a while Glenn listened to the rhythmic beating of the engines as he tried to puzzle out the mystery of the strange men with the yellow faces who seemed bent on following them and doing them personal harm.

He didn't actually know why he had asked for the information about the dirigibles, but

somewhere in the far recesses of his mind a plan of action was taking form. Perhaps when he was ready, he would have the solution which they were seeking.

Glenn finally dropped into a sound sleep and it was broad daylight when he wakened, the remainder of the night having passed uneventfully.

He made the rounds of the rooms to see that Bob and the professor were all right before he turned off the current which actuated their invisible guardian rays. Then he phoned the bridge that the circuit was off.

Glenn pulled the covers off Bob and was just one jump ahead of his co-worker in the dash for the shower, but he made it by a yard and turned on the spray, while Bob danced impatiently outside.

By the time they were dressed the professor was up and they went down to breakfast together. They had places at the captain's table where Captain Reedy greeted them cordially.

It was their first meal in the main dining salon and other passengers looked at them curiously. It was evident from their glances that

they were being talked about aboard ship and much importance attached to the shooting of the previous night.

Loren was presiding at the first officer's table. He smiled and Glenn made a mental note that a thorough cultivation of the friendship of the first officer would be worthwhile.

After breakfast they gathered on the bridge where Professor Pearson asked for the latest weather reports. When they were handed to him he scanned them eagerly.

"Let me know at the first report of fog in our vicinity," he requested Captain Reedy.

They were about to leave the bridge when the chief radio operator hurried up with a message which he thrust toward Captain Reedy.

The commander of the *Houston* scanned the message hastily and then swung toward Professor Pearson.

"Here's news," he cried. "The *Red Wing* and the *Oracle* have been found!"

"What's that?" demanded Professor Pearson.

"This message. It's from the U. S. A. cruiser *Abernathy*. The *Red Wing* and

Oracle were found just a few minutes ago, drifting almost side by side."

"The passengers; the crews. What about them?" asked Glenn tensely.

Captain Reedy's face clouded.

"There was no one on either ship when searching crews from the *Abernathy* went aboard," he said.

Chapter XIX

Changed Plans

The news that the missing ships had been found had burst like a bombshell among the men on the bridge of the *Houston.* They were speechless when Captain Reedy informed them that both passengers and crews were missing.

Loren Helsell, the first officer, was the first to speak.

"We'll find out more about this." He led the way toward the radio room, where the chief operator was personally handling the transmitter.

"Get us everything you can," ordered Captain Reedy as the others crowed in behind him. "We want the location first."

That information cracked back over the ether almost instantly, but it was in nautical figures that meant little to either Glenn or Bob.

"How long will it take us to get there?" Glenn asked the first officer.

"Under forced draft, we'll make it sometime tomorrow forenoon," said Loren.

Captain Reedy wrote a hasty message to be flashed to the New York office of the Great Northern Company asking for orders. Then they waited for the full details of the discovery of the missing vessels. It came through piecemeal as the *Abernathy's* overworked operator found time to transmit it between the rush of official messages which were flashing between the cruiser and Washington.

They learned that the ships had been sighted less than an hour before by the cruiser in territory which it had combed only the night before.

"That means they must have steamed into that region under their own power," said Bob.

Captain Reedy agreed.

"But how could they have been abandoned without some trace being left?" He fingered the rapidly growing stack of messages, which were written in the hasty scrawl of the chief operator, whose hand had been flying back and forth across the sheets of paper.

It wasn't easy to answer the captain's question and they sat down to go over the messages carefully.

"Here's one that says steam was up in both boilers and that the ships could not have been abandoned more than a few hours before they were discovered," said Loren.

"This one reiterates that there was no one aboard when the crews from the *Abernathy* went over the side," put in Glenn.

The chief operator turned toward them with another message.

"Here's one about the gold," he said.

"Is it there?" asked Professor Pearson anxiously.

"No, both safes were cracked wide open and more than four million of Uncle Sam's bullion is missing. There was more than three million on the *Red Wing* and a little better than a million aboard the *Oracle*."

"Then it begins to look like robbery may be the sole motive for these mysterious attacks," said Professor Pearson. "I was about convinced that the plot was even deeper than that."

"I'm wondering about the passengers who

were aboard the *Oracle*," said Captain Reedy. Worry was written in deep lines all over his face.

"You mean they may have been forced over the side?" It was Bob who gave voice to the question they had all hesitated to ask.

"There's no land within hundreds of miles and all of the boats are in their davits," Captain Reedy tapped one of the messages significantly.

"Oh, it's horrible," burst out Bob. "That means they must have been forced over the side."

For a time no one spoke and the only noise was the hum of the transmitter. Then the chief operator started copying a message. This time New York was sending and it was from the main office of the Great Northern Transportation Company.

"Proceed at once at full speed to scene of recovery of *Oracle*. Further instructions will follow."

Captain Reedy handed the message to First Officer Helsell, who was in charge of the bridge. Loren scanned it quickly and hurried out. In less than a minute, the *Houston* pul-

sated under the full power of its engines and heavy black plumes of smoke rolled out of the twin funnels.

Through the remainder of the afternoon the ether was jammed with messages being flashed to and from the *Abernathy*. Professor Pearson and his assistants spent most of the time in the radio room, scanning the messages as the operators copied them. Captain Reedy and First Officer Helsell came in at frequent intervals.

It was late in the day, just before the dinner hour, when an important radiogram signed by Gifford Crain came in from New York. It ordered Captain Reedy to put a crew aboard the *Oracle*, placing First Officer Helsell in charge. The *Oracle* was then to proceed back to New York where the first mate was to be assigned to the *Atlantica* on its trial run across the North Atlantic.

Loren flushed a deep red when Captain Reedy handed him the message.

"Congratulations, Loren," said the commander of the *Houston*. "You deserve the promotion."

"Thank you, Captain Reedy, but I'll hate to leave the *Houston*. I've enjoyed all of my work with you."

Later on the bridge, Loren spoke to Glenn.

"It's the chance I've been hoping for," he said, fingering the slip of tissue and staring in the westering sun. "The *Atlantica's* run will be the pick of all of the jobs in the company. Captain McAlister, a canny old Scotchman, is going to command her but he's about ready to retire. In fact, he's commodore of the line. The other officers are to be younger men and there'll be a good chance of eventually getting command of the *Atlantica*."

"We'll be crossing with you on the maiden voyage," said Glenn, explaining the plans of the scientists. "Every precaution will be taken to see that nothing happens on the first voyage."

"A vanishing act for the *Atlantica* would be disastrous for the company," said Loren. "The rest of the liners in the fleet might just as well tie up if anything happens on the maiden voyage."

"I've been wondering about the passengers

and crews," said Glenn. "Isn't there a chance they might have been landed someplace?"

Loren shook his head gloomily. "I'm afraid that's a slim chance. If they had been placed ashore on any mainland, their presence would have been discovered or they could have given the alarm in some manner. There are few islands in the North Atlantic where they could be landed. It's too slim a hope."

But even at Loren's pessimistic words, Glenn refused to give up hope.

At dinner that night the dining salon buzzed with conversation, for it was not generally known over the ship that they were speeding a forced draught to the scene of the abandoned ships.

Faces were strained and white as conversation turned to the fate of the passengers, who had been aboard the *Oracle*. Fortunately there had been only a small list, a few more than a hundred, and none of them had relatives aboard the *Houston*.

After dinner Glenn and Bob accompanied Loren down to the stokehold. The *Houston* was an older vessel, still fired by hand, and in

the heat of the boiler room, men were swinging from bunker to firebox door as they fed tons of coal into the white-hot flames which generated the power to drive them through the rolling seas.

Later Bob and Glenn made a round of the deck. The wind had freshened and there was a fine spray breaking over the bow. It cooled the pounding blood in their heads and gave them a clearer view of the problems ahead. Bob was frankly appalled, but Glenn, whose mind worked methodically and with scientific precision, was much more hopeful.

Returning to the bridge, they found Professor Pearson scanning the weather reports and shaking his head gloomily at reports that they could expect fog late the next afternoon.

"I don't like that a little bit," he said, but he failed to explain his reasons and Bob and Glenn refrained from asking him.

That night they put the photo-electric circuit in operation when they retired and were not disturbed during the early hours of the night.

At midnight Glenn cut in on the short-

wave transmitter and contacted the secret police station in New York City. There was considerable static and the range had greatly increased since the night before, but he still had plenty of power in the tubes to get through. New York informed him that Quentin had not arrived, but was expected momentarily and Glenn waited patiently.

It was nearly 12:30 o'clock when Quentin's voice finally cracked through the ether and the contact was completed.

"I've got a special assignment for you," the federal operator informed Glenn. "The *Oracle* is to be brought to New York at once by a crew your ship is to put aboard. I want you to go with them and return aboard the *Oracle*. That will give you an opportunity to make a thorough search of the ship for any clue, no matter how slight, that may remain."

"What about the professor and Bob?"

"They'll continue as planned, going on to England aboard the *Houston* and returning in time for the voyage of the *Atlantica*. Can you take this transmitter aboard the *Oracle* with you?"

"Easily. It's compact and can be set up and placed in operation in a very short time."

"Then do that and contact me tomorrow night at the same time. You'll be on your way back to New York by then."

"Isn't there any word of the passengers and crews who were aboard the ships?" Glenn knew what the answer would be, but he couldn't help being hopeful.

"Not a word. A good many of the government men are sure they have met a tragic fate, but I can't help feeling otherwise. There were 137 passengers on the *Oracle*, which with the crews of the two ships brings the total up to more than 500. I think we'll hear from them sometime, but when or how I can't even guess."

"We are steaming under forced draft at a little better than twenty knots an hour," said Glenn, "which means we'll reach the *Abernathy* and the abandoned ships sometime before noon. I'll convey your wishes to Professor Pearson in the morning and you'll hear from me tomorrow night from the *Oracle*."

They signed off and Glenn shut off his

transmitter, turned out the low light by which he had been working, and went to sleep.

There was a sharp wind blowing and the air was colder in the morning when they awoke. After breakfast they hastened to the bridge, where Captain Reedy was scanning the weather reports. Loren was busy organizing the crew he was to take aboard the *Oracle* and appeared only occasionally on the bridge.

Radio messages between the *Houston* and the *Abernathy* were flashing back and forth as the throbbing engines of the liner drove her toward the cruiser and the abandoned vessels.

Passengers, muffled in heavy coats, lined the forward rails as the time drew near for them to sight the other vessels. Captain Reedy continually scanned the horizon with a powerful pair of glasses. All over the liner there was a subdued air of tension.

Glenn had communicated Quentin's wishes to Professor Pearson, and the scientist had agreed that the plan was advisable. The portable radio was already packed and in its case, and Glenn had another large bag of paraphernalia in addition to a small handbag which

contained his personal belongings. He was to go over with the first boat, which would be under Loren's command.

It was almost eleven o'clock when the first smudge of smoke appeared on the horizon and it was another half hour before the three vessels they sought were visible.

Two boats were swung free from their davits and the crew which was to take charge of the *Oracle* set itself for the task ahead as the *Houston* stormed along at full speed.

Chapter XX

Nameless Fear

There was a constant interchange of radio messages as the *Houston* approached the trim, grey cruiser. Smoke was curling from the funnels of the *Abernathy*, which was to escort the other vessels to New York City.

The *Red Wing*, a cleanly painted tramp ship, was the nearest. Then rode the *Abernathy* and finally the *Oracle*, which Glenn was to board along with the crew from the *Houston*.

Professor Pearson called Glenn aside just before he went down on deck to join Loren's party.

"Watch out for fog," admonished the scientist. "I fear that our great danger lies in it. Keep a close check on weather reports and if possible have Loren run around any fog banks if that can be done. The fact that there is

nothing more of value aboard the *Oracle* probably insures your safe return to New York."

"How about yourself?" asked Glenn.

"I'm frankly worried," admitted the professor. "There is fog ahead of us in such extent that I fear it will be impossible for the *Houston* to escape going through it. However, I'll see that the crew is doubly alert tonight. I suggest that you keep your own short-wave set tuned for us."

Before he returned to the bridge, Professor Pearson handed Glenn a small package.

"Gas masks," he explained cryptically. "Wear them if you go into fog."

Bob accompanied Glenn down to the main deck, where the boarding party was making ready to leave the *Houston*. The rollers were breaking sharply, but the liner hove to and the boats were dropped in her sheltering lee.

Glenn and Loren were in the first boat to pull away from the liner. It was a good quarter of a mile to the *Oracle*, but the men at the oars bent willing backs and they made the trip in short time, coming up under the lee of the smaller liner.

A jacob's ladder had been lowered for them and two navy petty officers awaited their scramble up the side. Loren caught the ladder handily and scrambled up, but Glenn found that mounting a flexible ladder was anything but an easy task. Once he almost lost his grip to fall back into the sea but a wild lunge at another rung of the ladder saved him and the petty officers leaned down and gave him a hand when he neared the top.

The cruiser had put only a skeleton crew aboard and these men prepared to depart as soon as the *Houston* had sent over enough men to take charge. The transfer was made in less than an hour and the cruiser was ready to begin its voyage back to New York.

The siren of the *Houston* hooted in salute and smoke poured from the funnels of the liner as it resumed its course toward Plymouth.

The black gang brought over from the larger liner went to work with a will in the stockhold of the *Oracle* and there was soon sufficient steam in the boilers to get under way. The third trick radio operator from the *Houston* had been brought along and he flashed the

word to the cruiser that the *Oracle* was ready to get under way.

With the *Red Wing* in the van, the *Oracle* next and the *Abernathy* bringing up the rear, they started the trip back to New York.

Once under way, Glenn had his first real chance to go over the *Oracle*.

Personal belongings of passengers still littered the decks and the dining salon indicated that whatever had happened had taken place immediately after the dinner hour. Many of the tables had remants of food on them.

In the purser's cabin Glenn found the shattered safe which had housed more than a million of Uncle Sam's gold. The door had been ripped from its hinges by a powerful charge of explosive. The work was evidently that of a master safe blower, for nothing beside the safe had been damaged in the explosion.

Loren came in while Glenn was examining the safe.

"What do you make of it?" he asked.

"It's got me," admitted Glenn. "From the looks of the salon, the passengers simply got

up from their dinner that night and walked out. Where they went is the mystery."

"The crew's quarters are in the same condition," said Loren. "Whatever happened took them completely by surprise."

To this Glenn agreed, but what had been the nature of the mysterious visitation which had come upon the *Oracle* with such deadly effect?

Unable to answer the question, he turned his attention to more practical things, unpacking the short-wave set and placing it in the stateroom which had been assigned to him. This was located with the officer's quarters just aft the bridge and Glenn's room was next to Loren's.

It was late afternoon before Glenn was able to make a test and then he heard the operator aboard the *Houston* inquiring of vessels to the east on the weather conditions.

When the report came through of fog, Glenn's lips tightened. That was what Professor Pearson dreaded and there seemed to be a curtain of the grey stuff a thousand miles long. There seemed no choice but for the *Houston* to plow through it at reduced speed.

Glenn opened the package Professor Pearson had handed him just before he left the liner. Two of the latest type gas masks, snug and close fitting, were inside. These he placed on the table beside the transmitter.

Loren had personally vouched for every member of the crew brought aboard the *Oracle*, so there appeared to be no need to worry about the "man with the yellow face" who had reappeared aboard the liner.

Dinner that night was a hasty meal, eaten in relays. Part of the debris in the dining salon had been cleared away and since it was easiest to serve there, all of the members of the crew ate in the passengers quarters, coming in for food as their duties allowed. Even the men from the black gang came up, an almost unheard of procedure, but then conditions aboard the *Oracle* were far from normal.

Dinner over, Glenn returned to the purser's office where he again examined the shattered safe. In one drawer of the purser's desk he found a large reading glass and he scanned the remains of the safe for fingerprints. His search went unrewarded, for whoever had

smashed the safe had taken care to leave no telltale marks.

Returning to the bridge, Glenn joined Loren. There was half an hour of light left when they set out to make a tour of the boats. Each one was inspected in turn in the hope that it might reveal some sign of use. But again they were disappointed. If the passengers had left the *Oracle*, it was by some other means than the ship's own boats for the condition of the tackle indicated that they had not been used for months.

Back in his own room, Glenn again tuned in the *Houston*. The liner was stepping right along, steadily nearing the fog. Her radio operator was getting constant reports on the weather. It was mid-evening before Glenn was informed that the *Houston* was slowing down. Then came the news that the liner was going to lie to during the night, waiting for morning and the sun to clear the fog. This unusual order had been given directly by Professor Pearson, who had been empowered for such action by the vice president of the Great Northern Company.

Glenn made another round of the *Oracle*. It was uncanny, like being on a ghost ship. The smaller liner was brilliantly lighted from bow stem to stern, but with only the skeleton crew aboard, it appeared deserted. Occasionally someone hurried along the deck, or popped up a ladder.

Up ahead the riding lights of the *Red Wing* were visible, while to the rear the grey bulk of the cruiser slid silently through the sea. All in all, it was a situation which made the skin creep along Glenn's back and he returned to his radio.

Reports from the *Houston* were still reassuring, but Glenn learned that Professor Pearson was greatly perturbed and this, in turn, did little to quiet his own premonition.

The night was heavy with danger, a nameless feeling that gripped Glenn in a tight embrace. He went to the bridge and spoke to Loren.

"I'm uneasy, too," confessed the young commander of the *Oracle*. "Keep close to your radio and I'll have our operator on duty all of the time. That story the professor put

out about a million in bullion being aboard the *Houston* may cause trouble yet."

Glenn nodded his agreement. There was the fog and the professor feared the fog.

At eleven o'clock they ran through a light mist, halfway between fog and rain, but before midnight the weather was clear and the stars overhead were a brilliant blue-white.

Promptly at midnight Glenn called the New York station and found Quentin waiting for him.

"I haven't been able to dig out anything on the dirigibles you asked about," the secret operative informed Glenn, "but we're keeping at it. What's the latest from the Houston?"

"The liner's waiting for a fog bank to lift in the morning before proceeding," said Glenn. "Professor Pearson doesn't want to run through the fog and he ordered Captain Reedy to wait it out."

"How did he take that?"

"I don't know. We came aboard the *Oracle* about noon. I got that information from the *Houston's* operator. I don't suppose the captain fancied losing a night's run, but for some

reason the professor doesn't care for fog on this trip. He warned me to have a gas mask handy if we ran through any. There was a light mist a while ago, but nothing happened."

"What about the safe?"

"Ripped clear open. Whoever did the job knew his business. There isn't a clue on this whole ship."

"Keep at it. Something may develop. I'll talk with you again tomorrow night."

Glenn would like to have chatted a length with Quentin, but it was obvious that the secret agent was in a hurry, so he signed off on the New York station and tuned in for the *Houston.*

Glenn twirled his dials carefully, but he failed to locate the other liner. Then he spoke to the naval operator aboard the *Abernathy.* He, likewise, was unable to contact the *Houston.*

"Maybe it's the fog," said Glenn.

"Shouldn't be," replied the naval operator. "They've a powerful set that should come through all right."

For half an hour Glenn and the naval oper-

ator alternated in trying to reach the *Houston*, but there was no answer to their calls.

It was one o'clock when New York came in strong with an emergency call. Glenn answered instantly and Quentin's nerve-strained voice flashed through the ether with its terrifying message.

"The *Houston* has disappeared!" cried Quentin. "We've been trying desperately to make contact, but there's no answer."

Chapter XXI

Slender Hopes

The words of the federal secret agent, carried hundreds of miles through the ether, dazed Glenn.

The *Houston* had disappeared!

Bob and the professor were missing!

Those thoughts pounded through his brain.

Quentin was talking on and on, but the words failed to register. Glenn could think only of Bob and the professor and the menace of the fog Professor Pearson had feared. It was the fog, it had to be the fog. In that silent, grey stuff lay the secret of the disappearing ships.

Glenn turned and looked wildly out the door, half expecting some of the creeping, grey stuff to filter in through the half-opened door. But the *Oracle* carried no treasure. It had already been looted. He was safe.

"What are we going to do?" Glenn cried.

Quentin's voice, cooler now, whipped back at him.

"There's nothing you or I can do at present. The navy destroyers on the North Atlantic patrol have thrown out a long cordon that should result in the discovery of the *Houston*."

"But it may be too late," protested Glenn. "Passengers and crews of the other vessels were missing when they were recovered."

"That's the only thing we can do," insisted Quentin. "What with the fog and bad weather in the eastern half of the North Atlantic, I don't think they'll escape this time. The fog may shield them for a while, but it's bound to lift and the navy will pounce then."

Glenn felt somewhat better at that reassurance for when the *Truant* and *Oracle* vanished, there had been no protective naval patrol.

"Remain aboard the *Oracle* until it docks in New York," Quentin advised. "I'll keep you informed of any developments and in the meantime, keep up your courage."

Then the federal agent signed off and Glenn

sat looking at the transmitter. Loren came in and asked for news.

"The *Houston's* disappeared," said Glenn blankly. Loren shook him roughly and yelled at him.

"Snap out of it, Glenn! What's this about the *Houston?*"

"Quentin just radioed me that she had disappeared. They've been trying to get in touch with her for some time and have failed to make contact. It looks bad."

Loren's lean face was sterner and the steel of his grey eyes flashed.

"There's just a chance of a breakdown in their radio equipment," he said hopefully.

"But it's only a chance," replied Glenn. "You know a liner like the *Houston* carries plenty of extra equipment to handle any emergency such as a breakdown of the transmitter."

Loren nodded. It had been a slender hope anyway.

"There's something in the fog," said Glenn. "Remember how closely Professor Pearson watched the weather reports. Why, he even ordered the *Houston* to lay to tonight because

they couldn't run around that fog bank to the east."

"Have you any idea what there is in the fog that scares him?" asked Loren.

The young scientist pointed to the gas masks at one side of the transmitter.

"Gas?" Loren's eyes opened incredulously.

"It must be," nodded Glenn. "Why would he insist on my taking two masks if he wasn't afraid of that?"

"Of course. But why would the menace of gas be greater in the fog?"

"That's one of the mysteries of this thing. We didn't find a sign of a gas cylinder aboard the *Houston* when it was searched. When I first thought of gas being used to silence the passengers and crews of the first two ships to disappear, I thought it might have been released from secret containers. But in view of the thorough search of the *Houston* without finding any such paraphernalia, that theory is in the discard."

"What kind of gas is it?"

"That I don't know. But MacRae, the man

we first called the 'man with the yellow face' used some kind of gas to subdue the professor and me in the lab. Apparently it has no harmful effects, except to leave a splitting headache that lasts for a few hours. It isn't any of the commonly known gases, or Professor Pearson would have recognized it at once. It's something new that seems to drift along like a cloud so that it would be a menace in fog. You simply wouldn't be able to see it coming or know you were running into it."

"Then the first thing you'd know would be when people would start dropping all around you?"

"That's about right. At least that's the way I figure it out. You might know you were going under, but by that time you would be helpless."

"It's horrible," burst out Loren.

"Worse than that," conceded Glenn, "for it means there have been some aboard each of the ships that have disappeared who have known what was coming and were ready for the gas. When everyone else was unconscious, they took over the ship and directed it toward

the predetermined rendezvous with other members of the gang."

"But if that's true, no shipping on the North Atlantic is safe," said Loren.

"Right. But there's this much to help us. The attacks so far seem to be aimed to cripple the Great Northern Transportation Company. The thing that worries me right now is the maiden voyage of the *Atlantica*."

"Do you think they'll aim at her?"

"I'm sure of it. Think of the sensation. The world's fastest liner vanishing on its first trans-Atlantic voyage!"

Chapter XXII

Playing A Hunch

Through the long hours of the night Glenn clung to the transmitter, listening to the messages cracking back and forth between the naval searching craft.

The night was breaking when he heard the operator on the cruiser talking to the man aboard the *Oracle*.

"You're to go on to New York," the cruiser advised. "We've been ordered back to help search for the *Houston*."

The message was acknowledged and Glenn stepped out of the cabin. Against the faint grey of the horizon, the cruiser was turning back for the dash toward the last reported location of the missing liner. Great clouds of smoke were rolling from the funnels as the low, slender warship started back. Within a few minutes the sleek, powerful craft would be

knifing through the sea at better than thirty knots an hour.

An inward surge of elation swept over Glenn as he visualized what the powerful guns of the *Abernathy* would do if they were once trained on the sea raiders who had despoiled three ships.

As the dawn brightened, the cruiser grew smaller until there was only a faint smudge of smoke left on the horizon.

Loren, his eyes red-rimmed from lack of sleep, joined Glenn at the rail.

"I hope the cruiser catches those fellows," said Loren. "The gun crews of the *Abernathy* have the blue ribbon for marksmanship."

"I'm afraid they'll have too long a start," replied Glenn.

The radio operator, with a clip of new weather reports, joined them, and Loren and Glenn scanned the latest news.

Far to the east the fog still held and there was no sign of its lifting in the next few hours.

"That's bad," said Loren. "They can hide in it, almost sure to escape detection."

"How about steaming through it?"

"That would be taking quite a risk. They might smack into some other ship or at least come close enough to risk detection."

"Somehow I've a hunch that fog doesn't stop this gang or even slow them up. They strike with the fog, which in itself means that they consider it a real advantage. Think of the cover it provides for their escape if they steam through it at full speed."

"But where are they going?"

Glenn threw up his hands in despair.

"You only ask questions. You don't answer them," he protested.

"I'd answer them if I could," said Loren honestly. "Let's eat. We'll both feel better and have clearer heads."

He was right. After a hearty breakfast and a shower, with a change into fresh clothes, both of them felt much refreshed. Glenn went to his room and rested for several hours. Then he contacted the New York police station and learned that no further word of the *Houston* had been received.

It was obvious that the sea raiders had believed the story that the *Houston* was carrying

gold. Glenn wondered, with quaking heart, what they would do when they learned they had been tricked.

Ahead of them the *Red Wing* steamed through the choppy seas. At the speed they were making, they would be in New York harbor sometime the next night.

All morning long the ether was filled with messages flying between the navy craft hunting for the missing liner. The fog still held and the search went on without result.

Once a destroyer reported hearing the faint beat of a liner's propellers in the fog, but when it had dashed into the murk, the sound had faded.

Glenn checked the reported position of the destroyer and found that it was a good two hundred miles north of the spot where the *Houston* had disappeared. It was far off the regular North Atlantic steamer lane.

That discovery set him on a new trend of thought and he asked Loren for a set of charts. Taking these to his own cabin, he unrolled them on a table and pored over the maps. Then he radioed New York for specific

weather reports on the east half of the North Atlantic on the nights the first two ships had disappeared.

It took some time for this information to be gathered, and it was an hour later before the required data was in Glenn's hands. On the heels of it came a terse message from Quentin: "Have you a clue?"

Glenn's reply was equally terse: "Just a hunch."

Gradually the thoughts which had been running through his mind were starting to click, beginning to form the master pattern which he hoped would lead to the capture of the sea raiders and the solution of the mystery of the vanishing liners.

Chapter XXIII

Bitter Charges

Through the next twenty-four hours Glenn kept his ears tuned for some message about the discovery of the *Houston* that might come flashing through the ether.

Another night came without any encouraging word. The fog had lifted but the scurrying destroyers had been unable to find any trace of the liner they sought. Only once had the beat of a propeller been heard and that had vanished in the fog.

Loren came in during the early evening.

"We'll be in before midnight," he said. "We're going to pull ahead of the *Red Wing* now for we can make faster time since our ship is easier to handle."

The formalities of Quarantine had been waived for they steamed up the harbor after picking up their pilot.

Glenn left his transmitter and went out on deck where he leaned against the rail.

Ahead of him glowed the myriad lights of New York. Ferries churned anxiously along their route and a tramp ship outward bound hooted a wild welcome as the officers on the bridge recognized the incoming ship as one of the vanishing liners.

Loren yanked the *Oracle's* whistle in reply and the night resounded with the echoes.

Two tugs stormed up out of the night to help warp the liner into her dock. The ship gradually lost way as the tugs took hold, guiding the big ship alongside the pier.

From his place at the rail Glenn could look down on the pier. A compact group of men were jammed at one of the gates. Many of them carried cameras and flashlight equipment. Newspapermen. They were avidly on the trail of the biggest story in the North Atlantic in months.

Their ranks parted to let an outsider through and Glenn recognized Quentin.

The forward movement of the *Oracle* ceased and the gangway was lowered. Two burly

policemen took their stations at each side. The only man to come up was Quentin, who raced up the gangway in long strides. The newspapermen were left to storm in futile anger on the pier and pop flashlights at whatever members of the crew appeared along the rail long enough for them to snap.

Quentin rushed up to Glenn.

"I planned to come down with the pilot boat and meet you," he said, "but I missed out by minutes. Anything new?"

"Nothing definite," parried Glenn, "but I think I've got the eventual key. It's got to be."

"We'll go over it in a few minutes. Take me around."

Loren joined them.

"Newspapermen are about ready to storm the gangway," he said. "Is there any harm in letting them come aboard and talk with the crew?"

Quentin turned toward a man hurrying up.

"Here's Mr. Crain. We'll let him decide."

After brief greetings with the vice-president of the Great Northern Transportation, the question was put to Mr. Crain.

"There can be no harm," he decided. "The newspapers are filled with stories and rumors and everyone is conjecturing about what is taking place in the North Atlantic. If talking with members of this crew and going over the ship will appease them somewhat, I have no objections."

"Just one thing," interposed Quentin. "I don't want them in the purser's room until my experts have gone over the safe thoroughly."

Loren agreed to this and hurried away to inform the reporters that they could have the run of the ship with the exception of the purser's quarters. In less than five minutes newspapermen were scattered all over the *Oracle*, questioning every member of the crew they could reach and snapping pictures with great abandon.

Quentin, Mr. Crain, and Glenn went to the privacy of Glenn's room where they closed and locked the door.

"Now let's have the whole story," said Quentin. "Start from the time you cleared the harbor until you received the news that the *Houston* had disappeared."

They settled back in chairs and Glenn recounted in detail everything that had happened—how he had been alarmed by the "man with the yellow face," the thorough but unrevealing search of the *Houston*, the news of the discovery of the two missing ships, Professor Pearson's warning against fog and finally the disappearance of the *Houston* itself.

Mr. Crain was inclined to be bitter.

"I blame Professor Pearson for this third tragedy," he said firmly. "I was against putting the story about the gold being aboard in the papers and it looks now as though that story was the bait that led to the attack on the *Houston*."

"Undoubtedly," agreed Quentin, "but I haven't given up hope but what Professor Pearson may be able to turn the tables on these sea raiders. Remember, he's one of the cleverest men in the scientific game."

"It begins to look like this gang was too clever for either detectives or science," snapped the executive of the shipping line. "It may be necessary for us to cancel the maiden voyage of the *Atlantica*."

"I feel sure I have the key to the mystery," said Glenn quietly. "Of course there's a chance that I'm wrong, but certainly my plan is worth trying."

Quentin and the shipping official stared at the young scientist. Then Glenn unfolded for them his theory of the disappearing liners.

Chapter XXIV

Solving the Puzzle

"I've been thinking this thing over for days," he told them as he started his story slowly, "and I'm going on the assumption that Hans Kraus and the North Europa Company are involved."

He looked questioningly toward Quentin.

The secret service operative nodded his affirmation.

"With that as a foundation," went on Glenn, "the puzzle started to fit. If the *Atlantica* makes a successful maiden voyage, it stands to reason that the Great Northern Company will get the cream of the trans-Atlantic trade. Such a result would ruin the North Europa, which is heavily involved over the construction of its last large ships."

"But what about the raid on the first three ships? Gold seemed to be the motive in each

case." It was Mr. Crain asking the question.

"Gold was the motive in those cases, for a company as deeply in debt as the North Europa could use four million in bullion easily. In addition, it threw a real scare into North Atlantic shipping."

"But how were the ships made to disappear? What happened to the men and women aboard them?" It was the impatient Mr. Crain again.

Glenn waved the question aside. He would answer them in his own good time.

"Now I'm going back to that first night in the lab. Somehow the agents working on this case knew Professor Pearson was being called in. How they knew we may never know, but they found out in some manner and put in an appearance even before Mr. Crain arrived."

"You mean MacRae, the first 'man with the yellow face'?" It was Quentin this time.

"Right. MacRae apparently was designated to get us out of the way and he did it effectively. It was some kind of a new gas and I'm convinced that the 'yellow face' he had was a new type of gas mask, probably made, just for this purpose, of close-fitting rubber fabric. I

remember that the lips never seemed to move, which would indicate a mouthpiece of some kind through which air was obtained."

"I agree with you on that," said Quentin, "but when MacRae went over the side of the *Truant*, I thought we were through with the 'yellow face' part of this mystery."

"I wasn't so sure," said Glenn. "When another man wearing the same kind of a mask appeared aboard the *Houston*, I was convinced that they were using gas in some way to gain control over the ships. But the thorough search of the *Houston* we made the next day failed to reveal any secret containers of gas and that gave me a setback."

He paused for a moment, collecting the next part of his theory to toss at them.

"Professor Pearson was tremendously worried about the fog," he went on. "He kept watching the weather reports and as you know ordered the engines of the *Houston* stopped when they found they couldn't run around that bank of fog."

His listeners nodded their agreement.

"Now isn't it entirely possible that a cloud

of this new gas might resemble a cloud of fog?" asked Glenn.

"You mean then that the ships steamed directly into the gas without the slightest warning, thinking it was fog?" The question tumbled from the tense lips of the shipping official.

"That's just what I mean," said Glenn quietly but firmly. "The gas took them unaware and they dropped wherever they were. A few secret agents of the men behind this diabolical plot were aboard and they had their masks ready. They took charge of the ship until they were joined by other members of the gang. Then the safe was blown open, the gold taken, and they escaped."

"But that isn't all," put in Quentin. "Where were the ships between the time they disappeared and the time they were discovered?"

"And what happened to the passengers?" burst out Mr. Crain.

"I've only got hunches about that," admitted Glenn, "but I think they'll be borne out when we finally learn the truth. Will you have the

coal in the bunkers of the *Red Wing* and the *Oracle* checked for quantity and whether it is the same kind as was placed in there when they started their voyages?"

Quentin hastened away to see that the request was fulfilled and Mr. Crain lighted his pipe with nervous hands.

"It's the passengers I'm worried about," he said. "It doesn't seem possible the raiders could have forced them over the side. You're sure there was no trace of them?"

"You've had more reports than I have," retorted Glenn, "but I think we'll find them all safe somewhere. Such a wholesale tragedy would bring the wrath of the world down upon the perpetrators of such an outrage."

The young scientist turned to the charts Loren had loaned him. He ran his finger over the eastern half of the North Atlantic map.

"There was fog with each disappearance," said Glenn. "That meant plenty of protection while the safe was being blown and a few hours in which to make a safe getaway."

"Travel would be slow in the fog," said Mr. Crain.

"The beat of the propeller the destroyer picked up the other night was fast; fast enough for a ship traveling under forced draught," Glenn reminded him. "No, travel at high speed in the fog isn't at all improbable. In fact, I think that's the solution. The raiders use the fog as a cover for their gas and to make their escape."

"But how are they guided through it?"

"There's where you have me. My only explanation is a dirigible, flying above the fog and guiding the ship by a radio compass."

"But could that be done?"

"Easily. The dirigible could also land the additional members of the raiding party on the deck of the liner after the passengers and crew had succumbed to the gas."

"I believe you're right, but it's horrible to contemplate," admitted Mr. Crain.

"With the dirigible overhead directing the liner, they could travel hundreds of miles through the fog. I've checked the weather reports on the disappearance of the *Oracle* and the *Red Wing* and I've learned that in each case there was a long belt of fog in the North At-

lantic. In fact, it extended practically to Iceland."

"Meaning what?"

"Meaning that it is entirely possible that the ships were navigated up there and the passengers unloaded at some lonely isle along the coast. Probably food was set ashore for them or a cache had already been made."

"But the passengers wouldn't have been unconscious all of the way. Neither would the crew."

"Continued shots of the gas would have rendered them helpless," pointed out Glenn and Mr. Crain shuddered at the suggestion.

Quentin returned and Glenn briefly recounted the beliefs he had expounded to the shipping official.

"You must be right," said Quentin. "It's the only explanation that fits. I've learned something interesting about Kraus. He was in the German Zeppelin service during the war and since has carried on some experiments in lighter-than-air craft at his own estate in Germany. It is entirely possible that he has con-

structed a small dirigible which is being used for this purpose."

"What are we going to do about the *Atlantica?*" asked Mr. Crain.

Quentin's lips tightened.

"Don't change your plans. Go through with the maiden voyage as scheduled, but this time we'll be prepared for a gas or air raid."

Chapter XXV

Eastward Bound

It was ten days later when the *Atlantica* sailed at midnight. In spite of the disappearance of three ships in the North Atlantic, there was almost a full passenger list.

The great liner was aglow with light from bow to stern and a brass band played loudly on the pier. Ship news photographers were all over the boat snapping last-minute pictures of celebrities. The warning bells sounded and there was the mad scramble of visitors to reach the gangways.

Glenn was on the bridge standing beside Loren. Over to one side stood Captain McAlister, a dour Scot, and nearby was Robert Quentin. Fifty federal agents were aboard, assigned to cabins on every deck and mixing with every type of passenger.

On the bridge deck rapid fire anti-aircraft

guns had been mounted and the catapult on the forward deck had a heavily armed navy seaplane on its skids. Special gas masks were at hand on the bridge, in the radio room and in the engine room. The great liner and its crew were ready for any emergency.

A swarm of snorting tugs took hold of the giant. Gradually the pier slid away. Then they were in mid-river, turning toward the harbor and the open sea.

The lights of the pier were dwarfed. Then the glow of New York faded. They dropped the pilot and with a fresh wind whipping over the water, the mighty engines of the *Atlantica* started the great liner on its eastward race.

All preparations for the protection of the liner had been placed in the hands of Quentin and Glenn. Loren had given them able assistance, but Captain McAlister, inclined to doubt the stories of the menace of the sea, and looked on askance. He had been especially perturbed about the mounting of the anti-aircraft guns. Naval gun crews had been brought aboard and there was plenty of ammunition for any emergency.

The weather would hold the key to success or failure, for Glenn felt sure that no attempt would be made on the liner unless there was plenty of fog to shield the escape.

There had been no news from the *Houston* since its disappearance, but Glenn remained calmly hopeful that in the end the professor and Bob would be found and with little harm done them.

While Quentin had accepted Glenn's theory, high naval officials had scoffed at the idea that the passengers might have been landed near Iceland, and no searching party had been sent. They were convinced that both passengers and crews had been forced over the side.

The *Atlantica* was rated a four-day boat, clipping even the time of the *Bremen* and the *Europa*, so after the second day out they were in the danger belt.

Glenn and Quentin practically lived in the radio room aside from an occasional round to talk with the gun crews or the flyers and to make sure there were plenty of gas masks where members of the crew could get them.

Additional doctors had been brought aboard to treat the passengers in case of a gas attack.

The sea was choppy and Glenn and Quentin walked to the rail of the bridge deck for a breath of air.

"You think we'll find the professor and Bob?" asked Quentin, whose face plainly showed the strain.

"Remember what you learned about the coal in the recovered ships? It was entirely different from that placed in the bunkers when they left port, which meant a long voyage after they disappeared," Glenn reminded him.

Quentin couldn't get around that fact, for the difference in the coal certainly made it look as though the ships had been refueled after their disappearance.

It was late in the afternoon when the first reports of fog began to come in. From that time on, Glenn and Quentin never left the radio room. The gun crews remained close to their stations and the naval flyers ripped the tarpaulins off their craft and made sure their machine guns were ready for instant use.

Unquestionably the sea raiders had agents

aboard, but every message had been censored and all messages in code had been refused. There was little chance that any warning of the preparedness of the liner could have leaked out.

On the upper deck Glenn had mounted a steel diaphragm, so sensitive it could detect the beat of an airplane or dirigible motor at a great distance. It was with this device that he hoped to outguess the sea raiders and have a surprise welcome ready for them.

The day waned and with the coming of dusk the first fingers of fog appeared.

Captain McAlister himself took charge of the bridge, and the orders were still full speed ahead. The smoke still trailed from the triple funnels as the *Atlantica* rushed toward the grey wall.

On the top deck the gun crews unlimbered the racks of ammunition and the naval flyers crept into the cockpit of their plane. Federal agents were surrounding them so that no sabotage could take place to the plane.

Lights glowed all over the liner. In the salons below passengers were dining while on

the upper deck they prepared for the showdown.

Still rushing ahead with the spume flying from her sharp bow, the *Atlantica* swept through the fog. The belt was more than a hundred miles wide and five hundred or six hundred miles long—ideal weather for the sea raiders.

At the diaphragm Glenn and Quentin listened in the earphones for some sound from the skies.

The night darkened and the fog became more dense. It was eight o'clock when the first faint beat of motors could be heard. Then they deepened into a roar as Glenn tuned the microphone. Signal bells rang and lights flashed all over the ship. Crew members slipped the gas masks into their clothes and examined the revolvers which had been issued to them. The breech blocks of the anti-aircraft guns snapped shut behind the shells and the radio operator turned on his radio compass to help the naval flyers if they took off in the fog.

Chapter XXVI

Secret of the Fog

In the bow of the *Atlantica* Glenn had set up a gas detector and this was connected with an indicator into which he now gazed. At the first whiff of the stuff, the needle would move.

Glenn watched it intently, listening meanwhile to the approach of the airplane engines. At least two motors were droning along somewhere out there in the fog, but they appeared to be down now almost to idling speed.

The needle of the gas indicator flickered and Glenn tramped hard on a button on the deck. Instantly the ship resounded to the clanging of alarm bells and members of the crew seized gas masks. From special tanks jets of oxygen were unleashed and wind machines roared. Driven by powerful motors their propellers created a tremendous current of air that blew the gas away from the *Atlantica*.

Glenn estimated that in less than five minutes they would be through the dangerous belt of gas.

He was right. Exactly four minutes later the gas indicator slipped back to normal and the wind machines and oxygen jets were shut off.

Two sharp bells rang through the ship. From someplace below came the sound of a commotion and half a dozen burly sailors appeared headed for the bridge. Between them three men were struggling vainly, their faces covered by the now familiar yellow masks. The sea raiders had been ready to take over the *Atlantica* as soon as the gas rendered crew and passengers helpless.

In accordance with the pre-arranged plan, the giant liner was stopped. Members of the crew dropped limp on the deck as though cut down by the gas.

Glenn listened to the drone of the motors. They were nearer now. The gun crews crouched under the rapid firers.

For two long, tense minutes they watched as the sound of the motors came nearer.

Then out of the fog came the drifting hulk of a small dirigible, nosing down toward the deck, lines trailing so it could be made fast. Three sailors leaped ahead to seize the lines.

With bated breath Glenn and Loren crouched in the darkness next to the bridge. Captain McAlister himself was at the engine room signal.

Its motors idling, the dirigible came lower, the sailors pulling lustily on the lines.

The airship was a small craft, but with excellent lines. It appeared to have a metal hull.

From the interior of the dirigible a ladder was dropped and men started scrambling down the swaying thing. They came rapidly, half a dozen of them, but they were on deck before they realized they were in a trap.

There was a gutteral shout of alarm and the motors of the dirigible roared, the airship rocketing upward as it burst away from the lines which held it to the deck.

While a rough and ready fight started on the deck, the naval gunners trained their weapons on the fast-vanishing dirigible. Both guns roared at the same time and scored direct hits.

Glenn, charging down the deck to join the fray, saw the thin metal hull of the airship explode under the impact of the shells. From somewhere above there came a muffled scream that trailed away into the fog.

The guns were silent, their work done in that one short, sharp burst.

Loren shouted orders for the boat crew to lower away and Glenn gave his attention to the fight between the sea raiders and the members of the *Atlantica's* crew.

By the time he reached the scene, the battle was over. The *Atlantica's* men had wielded clubs in a none too gentle manner and all of the raiders were subjects for the hospital. The chief surgeon hurried up and looked at them skeptically.

"Looks like half a dozen cases of concussion," he said. "Somebody leaned heavy on the clubs."

The captives were carried away and Glenn rejoined Loren on the bridge. For half an hour the *Atlantica's* searchlight swept the gloom while the life boat attempted to find the dirigible. When it returned the report was brief.

Only a few pieces of fabric had been found floating on the surface. The airship, struck by the shells, had sunk almost as soon as it struck the water.

With that news, Glenn hurried below to the hospital. One of the raiders was conscious and Glenn fired his questions at him. For a time the man refused to answer, but when Glenn hinted he would turn him over to the crew for treatment, the man's tongue loosened.

Quentin took the notes.

"Was Kraus in charge?" asked Glenn.

"Yah," was the sullen reply. Then, as though realizing that the game was up, the prisoner spoke in English without an accent.

"Kraus was in the dirigible when it was struck by the shells. You'll never find him."

"There was no trace of him," said Glenn.

"He said he would never be taken alive," replied the captive. "How did you escape the gas?"

"Oxygen jets and wind machines, plus plenty of gas masks," explained Glenn.

"But the anti-aircraft guns? Did someone turn traitor?"

"Well hardly," put in Quentin. "You were up against scientists a little too smart for you. Meet one of Professor Pearson's assistants."

The captive's bright eyes hardened.

"But we got Professor Pearson and one of his assistants when we captured the *Houston*," he said.

"Yes, but you didn't take Heath. He's the chap who figured out your methods of attack. If it hadn't been for him, you would have bagged the *Atlantica*."

"Where is Professor Pearson, Bob and all of the rest?" asked Glenn.

"If you know so much about our methods, why don't you find them?" challenged the prisoner.

"They're somewhere in the vicinity of Iceland, either on the coast or on a nearby island."

The captive's eyes widened.

"Right," he nodded. He asked for paper and pencil and wrote down nautical terms in longitude and latitude.

"You'll find them there," he said, handing the slip to Quentin. "It's an island just off the west coast of Iceland."

"Have they been harmed?" asked Quentin anxiously.

"Perhaps they have been a little chilly, and they probably have suffered severe headaches, but aside from that their health is good. They have had plenty of food."

"What of the others? The crews of the *Oracle*, the *Red Wing* and the *Houston* and their passengers?" Glenn asked.

"They are there, too. All of them had the same treatment. After we captured the ships we took them north through the fog. The dirigible guided us with a radio compass. Once at the island we took our time, unloading the passengers and replenishing the bunkers of the ship with coal from a collier we had stationed there. Then we waited until another fog descended and steamed the ship back near the regular steamer lane. Simple?"

"Diabolically. Only the brain of a madman could have worked it out," said Glenn. Quentin slipped away to inform the naval vessels of the location of the passengers and crews of the raided vessels.

"Kraus was mad," nodded the German.

"Ever since the war he had not been right. When he built those last two liners he wrecked the company financially. Then when your company launched the *Atlantica* he saw his doom unless he ruined your company. He tried and failed."

"But the dirigible? What about it?"

"It belonged to Kraus. It was all-metal. He had been experimenting ever since the war."

"And the gas?"

"That too was one of Kraus' developments. He alone knew the secret. It was some type of mustard gas for it was heavy, yet it didn't burn the flesh or sear the lungs when breathed. The masks were especially made, as much for the hideous effect as anything else. The gas was released from the dirigible before the liner came along."

"They accomplished that," conceded Glenn.

The prisoner lay back on his bed, exhausted by the shock of the fight and the knowledge that the sea raiding was at an end.

"You'll find the men, women and gold

on the island," he said. "Now let me sleep."

Glenn left the room. A great weight had been lifted from his mind. Professor Pearson and Bob were safe and the mystery of the "men with the yellow faces" had been solved.

The *Atlantica* was again under full steam and little more than an hour had been lost in the capture of the sea raiders and the destruction of the dirigible.

Even then messages were crackling through the fog and naval vessels, under forced draught, were heading for the lonely island.

Quentin and Glenn met on the bridge. The fog was thinning and the siren of the liner was blowing less frequently.

"I'm sending a special report to Washington commending you for your fine work," Quentin told the young scientist.

"That isn't necessary," said Glenn. "Knowing that the professor and Bob are alive is enough."

It was dawn before the message came from the north. The cruiser *Abernathy* had reached the island and the first message through was to Glenn.

"Don't worry. Safe and well. See you in London." It was signed by the professor and Bob.

It was not until then that Glenn relaxed and went to his room. Dropping down on the bed, still fully clothed, he went into a deep sleep. For the first time in days he slept without visions of "men with yellow faces" racing through his mind for the mystery of the sea raiders had been solved and once more shipping on the North Atlantic was safe.

THE END